Notorious
PARK AVENUE PRINCE
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHORS
BROOKE BLAINE
AND
ELLA FRANK

notorious park avenue prince

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OceanofPDF.com

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Cover Design: Hang Le
Cover Photo: Ren Saliba
Edited by Arran McNicol

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synopsis

Who are we? Like you even need to ask. We're the seven richer-than-sin legacies causing debauchery at the prestigious Astor University in Manhattan.
Some call us spoiled.
Some call us trouble.
But *everyone* calls us the Park Avenue Princes.

James "East" Easton
"The Pompous One"

I'm so over college. It was supposed to be the time of our lives, a time of debauchery, but one by one, Cupid aimed his arrow and hit every one of my moron friends.

Relationships.

Could there be anything more soul-sucking and lame? To be tied to one person, and have to think about their…feelings.

Fine. Whatever. I'll look for my fun elsewhere.

Like that teacher's assistant who keeps giving me a hard time. I wouldn't mind shutting him up—with my mouth.
I wonder if I could provoke him into it…

Zac Fletcher

“The Teacher’s Assistant”

There’s only one person in all of Astor University who makes me rethink my decision to be Professor Kingston’s TA—James Easton, the self-proclaimed leader of the Park Avenue Princes.

Pretentious doesn’t even begin to cover it. He’s arrogant. Obnoxious. A complete and utter snob.

But when one fiery exchange between us leads to the hottest sex of my life, I find myself coming up with creative ways to shut him up. East isn’t someone I’d ever consider being with in the real world, but lucky for me, he doesn’t want anything more than a hookup.

Even better, no one knows. Until the day my boss finds us coming out of the same empty room…together.

East misses nothing. Not the way I blush around “King.” Or the way my body reacts. When he finds out my secret, East makes it his mission to get the three of us together. After all, there’s nothing he likes more than a challenge.

And seducing the enigmatic, impenetrable Professor Kingston? That’s going to be the biggest challenge of all.

Notorious Park Avenue Prince is the sixth and final standalone novel in the Park Avenue Princes world.

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ONE

east

“‘HAVARD SENIOR PRANK turns campus fountains into bubble baths; overflow causes $100k in damage.’” I scoffed and flung the newspaper across the room, where it skidded to a stop at Donovan’s leather oxfords. “Amateurs.”

He leaned down to grab the paper and lifted a brow at the image of campus destruction featured on the front page. “Guess no one told them you don’t show your hand in March if you want to graduate.”

“Which is why we need to spend our final weeks at Astor devising something epic.” I scanned the room where my fellow Park Avenue Princes had gathered before the start of today’s classes. We’d long since commandeered this space, formerly one of the professors’ break rooms, but which now served as a private “princes only” spot at the university. As if I’d be caught dead mingling with the peasants in a common room.

“Let me guess,” Travis said, a devilish look in his eyes that I appreciated, “you already have a devious plan you want the rest of us to carry out.”

“While you give out orders and don’t bother getting your hands dirty.” Caleb drummed his fingers along the back of the couch, where Travis, his boyfriend—and stepbrother, the incestuous fuckers—leaned back against his arm.

“Someone has to wrangle the herd,” I said as I turned to face the small mirror by the entrance, checking to make sure I looked just as pristine as I had when I left my condo. I straightened the ascot at my neck between the

unbuttoned collar of my sky-blue dress shirt, smoothed a palm over my dark brown hair, and took a step back to admire the view.

Looking debonair, as always.

“Did he just call us a herd?” Gavin, the youngest of our group, said, and I caught his eyes in the mirror.

“Young Truitt, even princes need a king.”

“*God*, could you be any more obnoxious?” Caleb grabbed the newspaper from Travis and lobbed it like a Frisbee in my direction. It smacked against my tailored slacks, and I rolled my eyes. First, because of the fact that an assortment of newspapers from across the world was still delivered to the lounge in the first place when it was universal knowledge we’d taken up residence here, and second, because of the slouchy-beanie-wearing nuisance smirking in my direction. Caleb hadn’t been back in the fold for more than a few months and already he was a pain in my perfect derriere—when he wasn’t busy in Travis’s, that was.

“You could always leave,” I said. “Go frolic with the rest of the general population like a sheep.”

“Again with the herd shit.” Gavin threw his hands up.

“That offer to leave applies to *all* brothers who are annoying.” I aimed a smarmy smile his way. “Feel free to take me up on it.”

Daire—Gavin’s meaner half—narrowed his eyes, but before he could say anything caustic I waved him off.

“Heal, Bruiser. I don’t actually mean it.” I let out a sigh and wandered over to the window that overlooked the courtyard. A handful of months seemed like an eternity when I was stuck in the confines of Astor. I was ready to be done with school, to move on with life and start making the money I knew was out there waiting to be made.

Power. Prestige. Freedom. They would all be mine. As soon as I could blow this dump.

“East?”

I glanced over my shoulder to where Travis sat with an expectant look on his face. “Sorry, you’ll have to repeat that. I was busy wishing I was anywhere but here.”

“Nice.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I was daydreaming about how *gorgeous* you are and how beside myself I am that I no longer have a shot with you.” I smirked as Travis flipped me off. “Was there a point to your bothering me?”

“I asked what’s going on this week. Any new clubs we should know about?”

It wasn’t surprising he came to me with this question. After all, I *was* the one that got the invites on behalf of the group. Again, every group needed a king.

I slipped my hands into my jacket pockets and leaned back against the wall. “There’s some rumblings about tonight. I’ll let you know when it’s set in stone.”

“You ain’t got dick.” Daire’s new habit of involving himself in group conversations was something I was still getting used to. It was also inconvenient, as I rather liked my face as it was, and he tended to solve his disagreements with his fists.

“Now, now,” West, my best friend and roommate, added. “It isn’t nice to point out someone’s dating status.”

“Dating.” I screwed my nose up. “Again I find myself wishing I was anywhere but—”

Knock. Knock. Knock.

The brisk rap of knuckles on the door interrupted my clapback, but West understood exactly where I was going as the entrance to our sanctuary was pushed open…without permission.

All heads turned in the direction of the door, and as the unwelcome intruder stepped inside, I straightened from the wall, my spine stiffening.

Zac Fletcher, Professor Kingston’s teacher’s assistant and irritating thorn in my side, strode into our space like he belonged, doing a quick sweep of all who resided inside before his expression showed just how unimpressed he was by us.

Arrogant asshole.

“Please, do come in,” I finally said, not about to let him take the upper hand in my vicinity.

Zac’s sharp blue eyes zeroed in on me from behind his glasses, and the contempt swirling there had my adrenaline spiking. “I don’t remember asking for your permission, nor would I, since this isn’t a designated space for students.”

“Oh?” I took a step closer to the couches where my friends were suddenly sitting silent as church mouses. *Typical.* “And who are you? The campus police? I hate to break it to you, but you’re about four years too late if you’re here to toss us out.”

“East,” JT—West’s boyfriend and perpetual conscience these days—hissed, like that could stop whatever was about to come out of my mouth. I guess I couldn’t blame him. I’d be a good little boy too if my mom was the dean…

No, that was a lie. That would just make me more rebellious.

But he was boring like that.

“What did you do?” JT continued, like Zac showing up here was somehow my fault.

“What did *I* do?” I arched a brow at little Mary Sunshine. “What did *you* do? Still running off to tell Mommy everything we talk about? Everything we might be planning?”

JT aimed his one and only “angry” expression my way before turning back to West, who was shaking his head.

“Come on, you know he doesn’t do that,” West said.

“Do I?”

“Since you brought it up, I, for one, would be interested in hearing these ‘plans’ of yours.” Zac cocked his head.

When I opened my mouth to respond, I heard Travis’s low warning of “Don’t do it, man,” and let out a sigh instead.

“Is there a reason you’ve decided to grace us with your presence, or are you here hoping to score an invite to our next party?” I mimicked the way Zac stood, hands casually in his pockets, shoulders back and confident. Like nothing and no one in this room fazed him. “Because I have to say, as much as I’d enjoy watching the mess you’d turn into after a few tequilas, I’d rather not have such a stick in the mud in our VIP.”

“While it’s shocking your ego fits through these doors, it explains how you’re constantly surrounded by this entourage of yours.” Zac nodded toward my friends. “You pay them. No one could put up with you otherwise.”

A couple of those so-called friends snorted and began to chuckle, and without looking I would’ve put money on it being the two interlopers in the room—JT and Caleb.

I raised a middle finger in their direction while still engaged in a stare-off with Zac. “Considering you work for pennies in your thankless position, I’m assuming that means you’re here to get on my payroll.”

Zac took a step toward me, narrowing his eyes slightly, and I didn’t give him the satisfaction of moving an inch. “If the choice was to spend a

lifetime of luxury with you as my only companion or to live on the streets barefoot in winter with frostbite stealing my appendages one by one, I'd beg the bitter wind to please, *please* take another."

The room went dead silent except for West's "Oh *shit*."

"So the only reason I'm here," he continued, "is because Professor Rathborne wants to have words with you about your last paper. You can follow me now or deal with the repercussions of turning in an assignment detailing the many ways he made the wrong life choices."

"Sounds to me like he's grateful for my assessment and would like a few tips."

Zac reached for the door and pulled it wide. "Now, James."

A chorus of "oohs" sounded behind me, and I rolled my eyes but reluctantly started toward the door.

"I've told you during our previous encounters, *Zacharius*, that I prefer East," I said.

"And I'd prefer not to be the one who has to babysit your ass, but we can't always get what we want, can we?"

I shot my friends an amused but annoyed look. Before I walked out the door, West hissed, "East, seriously? You got this guy again?"

I'd long since had issues with Zac Fletcher, especially during my time in Professor Kingston's class. He'd had it out for me since we met, always holding the threat of keeping me from graduation over my head, and the guys were only too aware of how contentious things had gotten.

"Apparently he enjoys being a substitute whenever another professor needs a bitch to fetch." I lifted a shoulder. "How lucky am I?"

"If you need help hiding a body…" Daire flipped open the top of his lighter with his thumb and snapped it shut.

"You'd be the first one I'd call, Reaper."

"*James*." Zac's tone was beyond impatient, which means I'd pissed him off. *Good.*

"If I don't show up at lunch, send a search party," I said, and then let the door slam shut behind me.

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TWO

zac

PRETENTIOUS. CONCEITED. CONDESCENDING.

That summed up James Easton pretty well. *Averse to authority* could be another, and whether he liked it or not, that was exactly the relationship we had within these walls. I wasn't a peer he could trample all over the way he did with everyone else at Astor.

"So," he said as we started down the hall, "did any of my tips for Professor Rathborne include the use of a full-body deodorant to make it possible for us to sit in his class, or did I start with sex advice?"

"Doesn't seem like a guy who smells like that would need sex advice."

"Excellent point."

I side-eyed East. "You're conceding a point? To me?"

"Agreeing is not conceding."

"I didn't think you knew what it was to agree with anyone."

"I don't. Especially someone who would rather be homeless with frostbite than in my company."

"Admit it. You liked that one."

"Creative, but a little extreme. No one thinks I'm that bad."

I scoffed as we turned a corner, where the crowd of students died off a bit. "Everyone thinks you're that bad."

"Even you?" The way he kept his face so neutral yet so patronizing to anyone we passed was impressive, and I could only shake my head.

"Especially me." I opened a door to my right and gestured for him to go in first. He cocked his head at me in defiance until I finally said, "*Now*, James."

East smirked and took his time sauntering past me like the little shit he was. I followed after, shutting the door behind me, and once we were alone in the empty office, everything changed.

I barely had time to lock the door before East turned around, backing me up against the wall. His mouth crashed down on mine, and I met him with the same hunger that came from the long weekend away.

Gripping the lapels of his jacket, I tugged him in closer so that his long legs straddled my thigh. All that tension and animosity had my dick aching for release, and judging by the way his cock grew hard against me, he was feeling the same.

"God you're such a shit," I murmured, and he grinned against my mouth.

"And?" He nipped at my lower lip, and when I leaned forward for more, he dodged the move by angling his head to run his teeth along my jaw. "Makes you want to fuck me harder?"

I groaned, my hips jerking toward his like they had a mind of their own. "You have no idea."

Before he could dare me to show him, I tightened my hold on his jacket and spun us around so he was up against the wall. I gripped his chin and angled it in the pompous way that flicked my fuck switch, then leaned in to lick a path up the side of his neck. East gripped my hips, his hands boldly sliding around to cup my ass and pull me even closer.

"If I didn't have somewhere to be…"

East slid a leg up between mine, nudging my balls. "You know how I feel about empty threats."

"And *you* know it isn't empty." I nipped at his ear and thrust my body hard against his. "Are you forgetting last week? Livingston's empty lecture hall? Your hands braced against the podium?"

East's low moan told me he hadn't forgotten one forbidden second of that quick but satisfying encounter.

It'd been out of the norm for me, since I generally did everything I could to avoid making contact with East when we were within the halls of Astor. That day, however, much like today, he'd pushed my buttons, and he'd pushed them *really* goddamn hard.

One minute we'd been arguing over the fact that he and his "prince" buddies were an entitled bunch of brats who thought they could get away

with everything, and the next, his pants had been around his ass and I'd come all over him.

It wasn't one of my proudest moments, but knowing I'd be what he smelled like for the rest of the day gave me almost as much satisfaction as coming all over him in the first place.

East turned his head against the door as his fingers massaged my ass. "Then tell me who I have to kill to have you follow through."

"King."

East's eyes glittered dangerously, but the leg between mine slowly slid back down to the floor. "Well, I always did like a challenge."

I chuckled at his audacity as his hands dropped back to his sides and I took a step away from him. If there was one person in the school that people—East and his friends included—didn't fuck with, it was the professor I TA'd for. Professor Kingston—or King, as he was known amongst the student body.

"Not even you are that stupid."

"*That* stupid?" East arched his brow so high it all but hit his hairline. "Implying that there is some level of stupidity here?"

My eyes traveled from his leather loafers, up his immaculately tailored pants, to his slightly disheveled shirt and that ridiculous ascot. "I mean, you *are* wearing a maroon ascot to school."

East pushed off the wall and straightened his shoulders, reaching up to fix said ascot. "The color is plum, and it doesn't make me stupid. It makes me fashionable, distinguished—"

"Or self-important? Maybe vain?"

"Perhaps." East's eyes lowered to my mouth. "But don't tell me you've never imagined tying me up with it."

"Well, I am *now*."

"You're welcome." He stepped aside and shooed me toward the door. "But you better hurry along—your professor's waiting for you."

He was right. Professor Kingston didn't wait for anyone, and the last thing I wanted was to get on his bad side. "I'll see you tonight at Nocturne?"

East inclined his head. "I'll be there."

I moved toward the door, willing my dick to calm down so I could step into the hall without making a public spectacle of myself. But damned if I wasn't picturing his hands tied up with that stupid fucking scarf of his.

“Oh, and Zac?”

I glanced over my shoulder to see he was now stroking the *plum*-colored silk.

“I’ll be sure to wear this for you.”

So much for calming down. I let out a sigh and pulled open the door, forcing myself to think of anything but leaving temptation behind. We’d been doing this for months, sneaking around, usually outside of Astor, but never at each other’s places. That would be too personal, and this was just about sex.

Really fucking good sex. The kind that made me reckless and uncaring of getting busted.

Only I did care. I was two months from finishing my master’s, and it was a conflict of interest to be involved with a student, even if he was no longer under my direct instruction.

But we were careful…ish. I didn’t plan to get caught. I was just having f—

“Good morning, Zac.” The sound of Professor Kingston’s gravelly baritone had me freezing mid-step.

Oh shit.

I slowly wheeled around to face him and prayed he wouldn’t notice my still-not-completely-calm dick.

“Oh, hi, professor,” I said, forcing as casual a smile as I could muster with my heart pounding a mile a minute. You would think after working together for as long as we had that he wouldn’t be as intimidating as I’d always thought him when I was an undergrad, but that wasn’t the case. If anything, being up close and personal just made it more difficult, adding in a crush factor that hadn’t been there before.

Like before I knew how damn good he smelled or how he’d say my name with such authority I felt like I should kneel and say, Yes, sir.

Dark eyes that were almost black bored into mine before sweeping over the rest of me, and the panic I felt when they lowered had me coughing, forcing his attention back to my face and not my on-edge erection. “Are you feeling okay? You look a little flushed.”

“Me? No, sir, I’m fine. Great, actually. How are you?”

Smooth, Zac. Now he’ll definitely know something’s up if he hasn’t already seen your dick.

King’s lips twisted in faint amusement. “I’m assuming you were coming to find me, then?”

My mind blanked.

“To go over your course assignments for the week.”

Oh, right. My job. *Wake the hell up.* “Yes, sir, that’s exactly what I was doing. As a matter of fact, I have it right—”

The door to the empty office opened at that exact moment, and, because his timing was impeccable, James Easton stepped out.

It didn’t matter that he still looked as perfectly put together as he had been when he entered. King had noticed we’d walked out of the same *empty* room. He was too perceptive not to put it together, because the man didn’t miss anything. It was why I’d always been extra careful around him, and why I usually kept my mouth shut. So I didn’t slip and beg him to bend me over his desk.

East startled when he saw the two of us standing in the middle of the hall, clearly not expecting me to still be there after waiting the full minute to exit. But just as quickly, he smoothed his expression and winked at Professor Kingston.

“Nice suit, professor,” he said as he walked past us—ignoring me completely, thank God.

King nodded. “James.” As East disappeared down the hallway, King turned back to me and lifted a brow. “Making good decisions, are we?”

My stomach dropped to the damn floor, but before I could muster up some kind of excuse, King cut me off.

“I’ll see you in class, Zac. You can email the assignments.”

Without another word, he walked off, leaving me standing there cursing both East and my wayward dick. Professor Kingston was fully within his power to reprimand me, but I had a feeling I’d just been given a one-time pass. Which meant I had to tell East tonight that we needed to keep our hookups outside of Astor for the rest of the semester. He’d probably be annoyed about that, because East wasn’t the type to acknowledge there were rules he had to follow, but that was too bad.

I’d just have to blow his mind—and his impressive cock—until he saw things my way.

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THREE

east

“WELCOME TO NOCTURNE.” The smiling club owner, having ventured down from his perch to greet us—*as he should*—gestured to the raised platform VIP area that had been reserved just for us. “I heard you’re a fan of Beluga Epicure vodka, so we’ve got two bottles of our best on ice for you.”

“I see our reputation precedes us,” I said, clapping him on the shoulder. “Good man.”

“If there’s anything you need, please let me know.” He handed me a black card with nothing but a phone number printed. “My personal, direct line.”

I pocketed the card while Donovan thanked him for having us. We were always receiving invites to whatever hot new establishment wanted eyes on their place, and they always rolled out the red carpet and had their best on offer. Best table, best drinks, hottest staff…

Like the guy assigned to us that was busy pouring drinks. As I approached, he turned and handed me a dirty martini. “Your friends said this is your favorite.”

“A martini delivered by the sexiest man in the room?” I said, taking the glass from him. “Always.”

Even under the flashing lights I could see the way my compliment made him flush, but it wasn’t like I would ever take him up on the offer in his eyes. Leveling up was the only way to go, and someone pouring my vodka was not it, no matter how attractive he was.

I made my way over to where West sipped from his tumbler and was clearly enjoying JT's ass rocking back into him as he danced. He glanced at me, then to the waiter, and shook his head. "You're such a snob, my man."

With a shrug, I perused the crowd below us. "This isn't new information, but about what exactly this time?"

"You didn't look twice at that guy."

"What guy?"

West rolled his eyes and put his hands over JT's ears. "The hot one that just eye-fucked you—"

"And is serving our drinks? West, please. I'm not *desperate*."

JT pushed his boyfriend's hands down. "I still heard that."

"Heard what, Golden Boy?" West wrapped his arms around JT's waist, keeping him tight against him and nuzzling into his neck.

My gag reflex was working overtime as I wrinkled my nose at the display. "So do your umbilical cords just fucking attach when you're dating, or what?"

It was all too rare for any of my friends to be without their significant other these days, which annoyed and frustrated me to no end. Not because I was jealous and wanted what they had, of course, but because they weren't as much fun anymore.

Case in point, West and JT. Where West had once been down for any kind of delicious scheme, he now thought everything over through the eyes of his "Golden Boy."

It was bad enough I had to watch my best friend trip all over himself to get the limerick-spouting saint. But to have JT be the constant voice of reason meant I now had to watch what came out of my mouth.

Did I really think he'd run to tell his mommy everything we said and did? No. He cared too much about West to put his boyfriend in that position. But I was also aware that those softer, kinder emotions did not extend in my direction. Nor did I want them to.

"Maybe if you stopped looking down your nose at everyone from your high horse, you might find someone you're interested in," JT pointed out as he leaned back into West's embrace.

"And why would I want to do that? So I could be deliriously happy like the two of you?" I lifted my glass to my lips and took a sip. "Please, I'd rather survey any potential hookups from my *lofty* position so I can avoid the potential heart-in-eyes, poetry-writing virgins like yourself."

“East.” West’s eyes narrowed, and I knew I’d pushed too far. But hey, I’d had to adapt to JT stealing my best friend and partner in crime, so it was only fair he’d had to adapt to me.

“You’re so full of shit.” JT scoffed as he looked me up and down. “You’re dying for someone to scheme with and shake shit up. Add in a good fuck and I bet you’d fall harder than any of us.”

JT had developed quite the backbone hanging around the likes of us, and while I’d never admit it to him, he’d started to grow on me too. Like a fungus.

“This conversation is starting to bore me.”

JT smirked. “What? Is all this talk of feelings freaking you out?”

West chuckled and kissed his boyfriend’s temple. “Now, now, JT. You know East has feelings—they’re just buried *deep* beneath the surface.”

“Like Middle Earth deep?”

I narrowed my eyes, their easy camaraderie reactivating my gag reflex as I scanned the club for something to distract myself with. But every place I looked was couple city. Van and Kelly, his porn-star-turned-model boyfriend, were all over each other in one of the velvet seats at the back of the VIP area, and while it was nauseating to watch, I couldn’t blame him. We’d all seen what Kelly was packing.

But then there was Daire and Gavin, a.k.a. Scowly and Sunshine, and that was just weird. Daire didn’t smile at anyone and Gavin smiled at *everyone*, so it was like some weird acid trip to see them all lovey-dovey with one another.

I let out a sigh and redirected my gaze across the main floor of the club, taking in the sea of writhing bodies bumping and grinding against one another. It would be so easy to make my way down there, zero in on a prospective fuck toy, and have my way with them. But I had other plans tonight.

My glass now empty, I made my way back to our waiter, and with a fresh martini in hand I turned just in time to see *my* plans for the night walk in the club.

Now, I wasn’t the type whose stomach flipped at the sight of an attractive guy. But when my eyes landed on Zac’s familiar figure standing across the dance floor by the bar, my dick definitely had a reaction.

The studious glasses he wore in the halls of Astor were nowhere to be found, and he’d traded in his classic I’m-an-intellectual sweaters for a dress

shirt he'd left unbuttoned at the neck. Just inviting me to come undo the rest of them.

He ran a hand through his hair, the style a messy, textured pompadour of strands a couple of shades lighter than my dark brown. I liked that it was longer on top. Gave me something to grab on to when I had him down on his knees.

As he lifted his drink to his lips, he casually looked in my direction. I nodded to the beat of the music, giving him the signal while not showing my hand to my friends. They'd think the fact that I hooked up with Zac on the regular *meant* something, that I was turning into one of those heart-eyed idiots.

It was like they'd all forgotten that sex could just be sex. It didn't have to be that serious. Or boring.

Which was why Zac was here and why he was now heading toward the back of the club to find a private spot for two.

"We dancing, or you wanna do some shots first?" Travis threw his arm around my neck and held on tight even as I tried to shrug him off.

"Don't you have a brother to go fondle?"

He grinned, mischief flashing in his kohl-lined eyes. "Who says I haven't?"

"Considering your fingers are on my three-thousand-dollar designer shirt, that better not be the case."

Travis's head fell back with a laugh, and then he waved to get the hot waiter's attention. "A round of shots for the group—"

"*Not* tequila," Caleb muttered behind us, the buzzkill, but at least his return had Travis dropping his hold on me.

I let out an exaggerated sigh, my gaze wandering back to where Zac was heading up the stairs on the other side of the room. My cock jerked impatiently, ready for the hot mouth that kept me coming back for more.

"Oh hell no," Caleb said as shots were passed around. "I said *not* tequila."

"For fuck's sake, if you're gonna cry about it…" I grabbed the shot out of his hand and tossed it back, and the second the liquor hit my tongue it gave me the idea for the out I needed to disappear. Something that wouldn't look too suspicious.

Cringing, I shoved the empty glass into the waiter's palm. "What is this?" I said. "Motor oil? Where the fuck's your boss?"

Without waiting for a response, I stalked out of the VIP like a man on a mission. My friends knew me well enough not to stop me when I got pissed off, and serving anything but the best tequila would do it.

They didn't have to know about the erection pressing up against my tailored pants that grew more painful with every step I took. Or the teaching assistant that better be naked by the time I got to him. These were never long, drawn-out encounters. No after-sex cuddling wanted or required.

This was what my friends didn't get. The fun of sneaking around, getting off, then getting the hell out.

As I reached the second floor, out of sight, I untied my ascot and slid it around so that the ends were left hanging. Perfect for a certain someone to grab on to.

I scanned the space, wondering where Zac was hiding, but before I could walk any farther, an arm wrapped around my waist from behind and yanked me into a low-lit room. As the door slammed shut, I heard, "What took you so long?"

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FOUR

zac

JESUS.

THE SECOND East's cologne hit my nose, it was like a straight shot of electricity down to my dick. I hauled him into what appeared to be an empty suite Nocturne had for private events and put my lips to his neck, noting that fucking ascot from earlier in the day.

Of course he'd worn it, and of course I'd spotted him the second I entered the club. It wasn't all that hard when he was standing in the VIP section like some sort of lord looking down on all his subjects.

I was aware that should probably turn me off, but judging by the ache now throbbing between my thighs, it definitely didn't. Not that I had much time to think on that because as soon as I dared to question him, East's desire to be in charge took over.

He shoved me away from him, and as I took several steps back he locked the door and stalked across the room with a haughty look on his face.

"We're not in school right now, *Zacharius*. Or have you forgotten? Out of Astor's gates, I don't have to follow your schedule."

Arrogant little shit.

Never in a million years would I have guessed East would make my cock hard, but after our first explosive encounter, I'd known there was no turning back. There was just something so insanely hot about making him kneel, grovel, and even beg.

My legs bumped up against the arm of a velvet clubman chair, and as he continued forward, I began to unbutton my shirt. "I didn't forget. But I also

know how long it's been since you've had my dick in your ass and how eager that makes you."

East swiped his tongue along his lower lip as my shirt parted, revealing my stiff cock to his hungry eyes. "Are you calling me desperate?"

I reached for the ends of the ascot, lowering my lips until they brushed over the top of his. "No, I'm calling you greedy. Now get on your fucking knees. You know you want to."

East's eyes darkened as I tugged him down with that sexy piece of silk, then he reached for the button of my pants and freed my cock. I shoved my shirt tails aside so I could watch him swallow me, and he groaned.

That would never get old, and I knew exactly what he was responding to—my body. The first time I'd taken my shirt off in front of East he'd almost passed out, which was a boost to my ego.

I kept a professional front at school—it was needed, considering I was Professor Kingston's TA. But out of school was a totally different story, and I liked to keep in shape so I could keep pompous shits like East in line.

I gripped his chin and directed his eyes up to mine. "We might not be working on my schedule, but I doubt you want your friends to knock on the door when you're acting like my little cock slut."

East's mouth curled up on one side, but he didn't bother with a smartass reply—which was shocking, considering he was rarely without one. Instead, he jerked his head away from my grip and flicked the head of my dick with his tongue.

"*Shit*." I sucked in a breath as I watched him, moving my fingers to thread through the dark strands of his hair.

God he was good at this. I never would've thought James Easton would dirty his knees for anyone, but there he was, wrapping his lips around the head of my cock, teasing and sucking briefly before diving in and taking me so deep I felt the back of his throat.

Another curse escaped my lips as I tightened my grip on him. Guys like East never sucked dick this well. They were always arrogant and wanted to be served, which was one of many reasons I'd never looked his way. But he'd gone and proven me wrong the first time I let my control slip around him, and after that, it was all over.

Dropping my head back, I groaned as he swallowed me down, over and over again. I'd been thinking about this moment since this morning, an agonizingly long time to be edged, but it'd been worth it.

“That’s it,” I said, rocking my hips into his mouth. “Suck me deep.”

The fact that he obeyed that request was so damn hot I had to squeeze my eyes shut to stop watching when my orgasm threatened to cut this shit short. As much as I wanted to come on that talented tongue, we didn’t have time for more than a quick fuck tonight. I’d have to use and abuse that mouth another night.

I tugged his head back and the sight of those swollen lips had my fingers tightening in his hair. East cursed and wrapped a tight fist around the root of my cock, making me grunt.

“You’re gonna want to leave me some hair if you want use of your dick by the end of this.”

I smirked at his smack-talking mouth, but I really didn’t trust him not to rip my dick off if I didn’t do what he said. Something about that risk only ramped up his sex appeal more. Sleeping with the enemy and all that.

Liking my cock a little too much to risk amputation, I let go of East’s hair and took hold of the ascot still hanging around his neck. I drew him back to his full height, then leaned in and shut him up with a kiss.

East’s swollen lips were pillowy soft under mine as I shoved my tongue inside, and the salty essence of my pre-cum flavored his tongue in a way that had me reaching for the button of his pants. It was insane the way my body responded to him. My brain seemed to shut down the second he was within touching distance. But I wouldn’t stop and question it, not when it felt this fucking good.

Sharp teeth bit at my lower lip, and when I dragged his ascot free and walked around behind him, East shoved his pants and briefs down under his ass and moved toward one of the clubman chairs.

“Give me your hands.” My order was gruff, but loud enough for East to hear as he moved his hands behind his back and stood waiting for me to restrain him.

Who knew James Easton would get off on being ordered around like some kind of fuck toy? But it made sense. He wouldn’t respect someone he could walk all over. He needed someone who could give as good as he got, and happily, that person was me.

I took the scarf and wound it around his wrists, tucking the ends in and out of my way. Then, with a firm hand between East’s shoulder blades, I pushed him down over the arm of the chair until his cheek rested on the seat cushion.

“If only the rest of the world could see you like this—bent over, ass up, mouth shut—they might like you a little more.”

East glanced back over his shoulder. “I don’t need the world to like me, or *you*, for that matter.” He spread his legs a fraction and canted his ass back, and the slick hole winking at me told me he’d come prepared. “I just need you to fuck me. Think you can do that?”

I spread his smooth ass cheeks wide then took hold of my eager dick, dragging it down his shadowy cleft and nudging at his entrance. “Yeah, I can definitely do that.”

East shoved back. “Then prove it.”

I dug my fingers into his supple skin as I shoved the wide head of my dick into the tight ring of muscle, and East let out a loud curse. He dropped his head back to the cushion as I continued to push forward, and when I bottomed out I reached for his wrists and grabbed hold of them.

“Brace yourself,” I growled, and pulled my steely shaft from his viselike ass and surged into him. The chair slid across the floor at the powerful thrust.

East’s groan vibrated through him as his fingers curled beneath my hand, then I withdrew again and tunneled back inside. I went at him like this over and over, taking him hard, rough, and fast. It was the quickest way to get him off, and when he gritted out my name like a curse, I smirked.

“Yes, *James*?”

“It’s *East*. And fucking come already.”

My hips stilled, my cock throbbing in his tight heat, then I leaned down over the back of him and nipped at his ear. “Beg me.”

“Fuck you.”

I jammed my hips forward. “Beg me, East.”

“I hate you.”

“I know. But—”

“Please fucking come.”

“Where?” Yes, I was torturing him. Well, myself too. But it was rare to hear James Easton beg, and I’d be damned if I didn’t take advantage now.

“In me.”

“So you can feel me dripping out of you later when you’re back with your snobby friends?”

“I’m going to kill you.”

“Yes or no, East?”

“Fucking *yes*. Now do it.”

I straightened to my full height, gripped his tied hands, and braced my feet on the floor. Then I made James Easton fall the fuck apart. Thrust after thrust, stroke after long, deep stroke, his ass molded to my dick like a glove, and soon enough my orgasm was slamming into me, grabbing me by the balls.

I reached around under him, taking hold of East’s cock, and as my cum filled his ass, his dick began to jerk and spray the side of the chair. He buried his face in the seat cushion and screamed from the pleasure of being so thoroughly fucked.

My body shook as the final wave of pleasure vibrated through me, and as I pulled out of the relaxed body under me, I heard, “This better be a new fucking seat, or you’re paying for my tetanus shot.”

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FIVE

east

NOW THAT *WAS worth waiting for.*

I stood up and pulled my pants up over my ass before collapsing onto the couch nearby. My body just needed a minute to come back down from that high, so as I relaxed back against the cushion, I reached into my jacket pocket and pulled out a joint and my lighter.

I lit the tip, rotating the joint between my fingers as Zac stretched in front of me, giving me a nice view of that naked, spent body before drawing his pants up his hips. A damn shame, but we wouldn't have time for a round two.

He didn't bother zipping up as he fell onto the cushion beside me, and I took a couple of inhales before handing him the joint.

Closing his eyes, he took a hit and let out a long exhale. "You're a menace to my dick, you know that?"

The comment had my lips quirking. "You say that like it's a bad thing."

"Isn't it?"

"Would be if I were a stage-five clinger."

Zac took another hit and then passed the joint back to me. "You're definitely not that."

"Neither are you. Which is why this works."

"Outside of school." He rolled his head on the cushion to look at me. "No more fucking around at Astor. We're lucky it was King that caught us and that he likes me."

"Does he now?" I shifted to face him, his words piquing my interest. "Just how much *does* King like you, hmm?"

“Enough to let the fact that I’m messing around with a student slide the first time, but not a second.”

“Oh, come on now. Surely that’s nothing a little tug-and-suck couldn’t fix.”

“East.”

“What? You’ve never thought about it? All those late nights in the office…” I waggled my brows. “King isn’t exactly hard on the eyes. I bet he’s hard in other places too.”

“Fuck off with that.”

“I’d like to. How do you *not* get hard with the way that man fills out a suit?”

“Because I work with him.” When I shot him a gimme-a-break look, he looked up at the ceiling. “Okay, maybe I’ve had to hide my erection behind my laptop once or twice.”

Now we were getting somewhere.

“You’re not someone who hides anything,” I said, and shot a pointed look at his open pants.

“Unlike you, I know how to behave myself when I need to.”

“Really? Could’ve fooled me.”

“There’s a helluva difference between you and Professor Kingston. Starting with: he’s our superior.”

His assumption had me coughing on my inhale. “Our superior? He’s a professor. He doesn’t even have a net worth.”

Zac dropped his head back and made a sound between a groan and a laugh. “God, what am I doing with you? You’re such a—”

“Good fuck? I know. You’re welcome.”

“*Snob*. You’re a fucking snob.”

“Can I help that I was born into wealth?”

“No, but you can help how you treat others or, you know, converse with them.”

I took another inhale and blew out a couple of smoke rings. “Says he who is ‘conversing’ with me right now while his dick is hanging out of his pants.”

Zac reached down and stuffed his impressive cock behind his briefs and zipped up, making me chuckle.

“That didn’t mean you had to put it away.”

“It does when you’re being ridiculous and talking about—”

“Fucking your boss?”

Zac shifted in his seat, and that was when I realized I might really be onto something here. I’d been messing around with him before, but not even the safety of his pants could hide his newly interested erection.

I sat forward on the couch, resting my forearms on my knees and grinning. “You *have* thought about it, haven’t you?”

Zac’s glare was glacial. “Don’t be—”

“Ridiculous? You already said that. But here’s the thing.” I took another drag and pointed at him. “I think you’re lying.”

Zac’s jaw twitched, and my lip curled.

“See, there it is. Your dick and your jaw are twitching. You want to fuck King.”

“No.” Zac took in a deep breath then leaned forward and took the joint from my fingers. “I want *him* to fuck *me*.”

There wasn’t much that could shock me these days, but *that* admission had my jaw on the floor.

Zac lounged back on the couch and took a drag of the joint as I tried to remember how to form a coherent sentence.

“Nothing to say? That’s a first.”

Then it hit me—the exact thing I wanted to say. “I *need* to see that.”

Zac chuckled, the high-end weed and his admission clearly erasing his strict code of ethics. “Keep dreaming.”

“Dreaming? I’m fucking *fantasizing* right now.” And calculating just how difficult it would be to get *the* Professor Kingston to discipline his TA.

Oh, this is too delectable to ignore.

“Then you better keep on. It’s never going to happen,” Zac said.

“Says who?”

“Uh, me. I work with the man, remember?”

“Yeah long, late nights.”

“You make that sound so much dirtier than it actually is.”

“So it’s a *little* dirty?”

Zac reached between his thighs and rubbed the heel of his hand over his hard-on. “My thoughts, maybe, but that’s about it. Professor Kingston is always professional.”

“That’s because he doesn’t know you want him to bend you over his desk and rail you.” I leaned against the couch and drummed my fingers

along the back of it. “But I do, and now I want to see it. Like, I’d *pay* to see it.”

“Well, good luck with that.”

I narrowed my eyes, the doubt in Zac’s voice only making the challenge even more enticing.

“What if I could make it happen?” I said before fully thinking it through.

“East, let it go.”

“I can’t now. I won’t.” And that was the truth. I always got what I wanted, and it’d been too long since I had a seemingly impossible task to overcome.

“This is over even your head.”

“*Nothing* is over my head. You should know better than to tell me I can’t do something.”

“Oh fuck. I’ve given you a challenge now, is that it? You can’t resist someone telling you no.”

I lifted a shoulder, but couldn’t help the smile that came with already plotting how this was going to go down. “I won’t be told no. And since you’re with me, neither will you.”

“Hate to break it to you, but King’s not gonna fuck a student. Of that I’m positive.”

“Guess I’ll have to prove you wrong. I’ll enjoy that.”

“And I’ll enjoy watching you fail. That’ll be a first for you, huh?”

Snorting, I leaned in toward him, and he placed the joint between my lips for me to take a hit. “When I find a way for us to have a night with King, will you do it? Or will you pussy out?”

Zac arched a brow. “Do you see a pussy around here?”

“No. I see someone as interested as I am now. Good.”

“Hold on—I have to ask, since I know your history. You’re not gonna, like, kidnap the guy and tie him up, are you?”

It seemed reports of my extracurricular *activities* had made their way not only through the student body at Astor but also the staff. But he didn’t have to worry about that with King. Only special situations that called for revenge—like fucking around with one of our fellow princes and thinking they could get away with it—required drastic measures.

“Trust me when I say it’ll be completely voluntary. The only tying up will be the kind the both of us enjoy.”

Zac’s blue eyes flashed as he studied my face, and I could see the desire there, as well as the curiosity.

But he didn’t need to know the *how* to trust me. My dick was all in on this plan, and I wasn’t sure at this point if I wanted to just watch or be an active participant.

Actually, fuck that.

“You’re not against threesomes, are you?” I said.

Zac shifted his hips in a way that told me everything. “See? Greedy. You’re a greedy little fucker.”

“So that’s a yes to my plan?”

“That’s a hell yes. I’m in.”

“Well, if all goes accordingly, *King* will actually be in, but good to know.”

And it was. Really damn good to know.

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SIX

east

“UM. SO YOU’RE looking for…uh, what exactly?” Harry, our trusty little hacker nerd, pushed his glasses up his nose and looked up at me from the couch in the condo that I shared with West.

“Anything you can find on Tyrone Kingston that I can use to my advantage. The more indecent, the better.”

Harry frowned. “As in Professor Kingston?”

“The same.” Resting back on my elbow along the kitchen island, I lifted my vodka martini to my lips and took a long draw of the chilled liquor. When Harry bit down on his lip, I lowered my glass. “Is there a problem?”

“Well, no, it’s just…”

“Spit it out, Harry. I don’t have all night.”

He licked his lips in the way I’d come to recognize as a nervous habit after having him at the princes’ beck and call over the last two years. The kid could find anything on anyone, which made him an asset I fully used to my advantage.

“It’s usually other students you want information on, is all. Not teachers.”

“Please tell me you’re not having a crisis of conscience.” I pushed off the island and crossed the room toward him. “I don’t pay you to ask questions unless you want to know how fast and how much I need. Are we clear?”

Harry snapped his mouth shut, nodded, and got to typing.

“Good little hacker,” I murmured, and took another sip as the door opened and West stepped inside the condo. JT-less, thank God.

He kicked his chin up at me in greeting and held the door open wide. “Found this one downstairs asking to be let up. Know him?”

A fifty-something, short, balding man appeared in the doorway, and just like that, my plans were finally coming together. It’d been a little over a week since I’d told Zac to leave this King scheme in my hands, but I needed a bit more intel before I could begin to make moves.

“Ah, good, you’re all here,” I said. “Take a seat by Harry.”

Harry waved at the investigator I’d hired to follow King around for the week, and as he took a seat, I went to the bar for a refill.

West followed me. “What are you up to?”

“A late night study hang. Obviously.”

“Bullshit. What prank are you pulling and why don’t I know about it?”

I poured a bit of vodka into a shaker, set it aside, and then reached for the vermouth. “Aww, feeling left out?”

“Just curious. You haven’t mentioned anything about a senior prank, and I know you like to take all the credit.”

I tossed a handful of ice in the shaker and shook my head. “Nothing epic planned at the moment, but you’ll be the first to know.”

“Really?” He crossed his arms and nodded at the two in the living room. “So how do you explain having our resident hacker and a guy with a briefcase hanging out at our place? I know you’re not having drinks, since you haven’t bothered to offer either of them one.”

“Because this is business,” I said, capping the shaker and giving it a few rough shakes. “*Personal* business. Feel free to shoo now.”

“Seriously? You’re telling me to get lost?”

“Well, I wasn’t so crass about it, but yes, if that makes it easier to understand, get lost.”

West looked to where my latest guest was unsnapping his briefcase and handing over a manila file to Harry. “Whatever you’re doing, is it going to require I have bail money on hand?”

I snorted, then refilled my martini glass. “Please. Would I ever do something that would land me somewhere I wouldn’t be able to access high-end liquor and my bank account?”

“You’re right. Whatever was I thinking?”

“You were looking out for your friend.” I reached over and squeezed his shoulder. “Which I appreciate, but I don’t need you for this, and trust me,

it’s best you don’t know what’s about to go down. You wouldn’t be able to stomach it.”

I wasn’t lying. If West ever caught wind that I was down on my knees for Zac on the regular, he’d lose his lunch. Zac wasn’t exactly a fan favorite in our crew—and King? The group might look at him and wonder *what if*, but they’d never have the nerve to follow through.

Luckily, I wasn’t that easily deterred.

“Okay, then.” West held his hands up in surrender. “I’ll leave you to it.”

“Much appreciated, my man.”

“*But* if you need someone to bounce ideas off or talk you out of doing something disastrous…”

“I know where you sleep. Got it.”

West waved me off and headed to his room, and as soon as I heard his door shut, I made my way over to my busy worker bees. “Okay, let’s see what you’ve got, Kristóf.”

My PI handed over the file Harry had just flipped through, and when several photos of King jumped out at me, heated flames of excitement licked through my veins.

Fuck the man was hot. Tall and commanding, Professor Kingston filled out his camel-colored trench coat with broad shoulders that emphasized his towering physique. The color complemented his dark complexion, and with his short black hair and shadowed jaw line, it wasn’t only his presence making you do a double take, but the strong features of his face. The man just demanded attention.

How the hell Zac worked in such close quarters with him was a mystery to me. I wouldn’t be able to stop myself from offering him some extracurricular activities. But that was the whole point of this little mission, wasn’t it? Finding out a way for us to get up close and personal with that tall drink of water… Okay, maybe vodka.

“So the pictures are nice”—more than nice, if I were honest—“but what have you got that I can actually *use*?”

Kristóf cleared his throat and gestured to the folder. “I did as you asked and tailed your professor for a week. Most of the time it was pretty slow. Work, home, a function here and there. Nothing of much use.”

It was all I could do not to roll my eyes, but clearly he was leading somewhere. After all, he wouldn’t be here if he didn’t have the goods. I

wasn’t paying for pretty pictures. Even if I might make use of them later, in bed, alone.

“Then Friday came around and the professor’s whereabouts got… interesting.”

I looked down at him over the rim of my martini glass. “Define *interesting*.”

“I wish I could, but where he went is nowhere to be found. I have an address. A photo of the building. But when you look it up, it doesn’t exist. The amount of men going inside makes me think it’s definitely a place you want to be, though.”

That *was* interesting. “Like a club? Something hot and exclusive?”

He nodded. “I’d assume so.”

I turned to Harry, who was nodding, his fingers flying over the keyboard. “I’m working on it.”

“Work faster,” I said, then looked back to Kristóf. “What time Friday?”

“Eleven thirty.”

“What was he wearing?”

Kristóf stood and flicked through the photos until he got to several at the back that I hadn’t seen, and *holy hell*, if I thought he looked fine in a camel-colored trench coat, these photos were the ones I was going to keep under my pillow.

The navy suit with the low-cut vest left King’s white wide-collar shirt open all the way down to mid-sternum, and *God* what I wouldn’t give to lick a path over the muscular chest it revealed.

I knew the professor was fucking fine, but wherever he was going dressed like that, he was clearly out to impress.

“Uh, Mr. Easton?”

I shook myself out of my sex daze, trying to keep control of the visions I was now having of that version of King fucking Zac and then me, but it was growing *harder* by the second.

“Mr. Easton?”

There you go, focus on Harry. Concentrate on how he’s still *calling you something that reminds you of your father.*

Perfect, hard-on avoided.

“How many times have I told you, Harry? It’s East.”

“Uh, sorry.” Harry’s cheeks turned crimson as he gestured to the screen. “But…there’s nothing on this place.”

“What do you mean, nothing? How do you get in? What is it?”

“I…I don’t know. Maybe it’s through connections?”

“Well, I *have* connections. My name alone opens any door in the city.”

Harry just looked up at me, blinking behind his glasses.

“You need to dig harder,” I said. “You’re supposed to be the best at this.”

“I’ve run several searches, legal and not so. There’s nothing. Whatever it is, they don’t want to be found.”

A private, exclusive club that doesn’t want to be found. That King belongs to? Maybe it’s a sex club?

Now that was intriguing and could work in my favor.

“And the men?” I turned back to Kristóf. “They were all dressed like King?”

“Pretty much so.”

“Hmm.” My brain on overdrive now, I started to make plans for Friday and how we could get access to a place that seemingly didn’t exist. But I would not be deterred. I’d told Zac I would make this happen, and now that I had enough information needed to accomplish that goal, it *would* be done.

Plus, if we got in front of King in a sex club, would he really say no? I was a betting man, and I’d put good money on the fact he wouldn’t be able to resist us. Besides, who could ever say no to James Easton?

“Right,” I said, then drained the rest of my drink dry. “I believe we’re done here. You may leave.”

I gave a curt nod, then shooed them out with a wave of my hand. As the door shut behind them, I took the folder back to my bedroom and settled in on my bed, flipping it open to stare at King’s serious expression.

“What kind of secrets are you hiding?”

I ran a finger down that open shirt of his, imagining it was my tongue.

It was quite the mystery, this secret spot in Manhattan, one that had my curiosity at an all-time high, since I’d thought I knew every club—secret or otherwise—in this city. But it seemed our inscrutable professor knew something I didn’t, and that just wouldn’t do.

Gaining entry would be a challenge, but I always got what I wanted.

I scooped up my phone and, uncaring of the time, shot a message to Zac with the time and place, as well a delicious little tease.

Tomorrow night. Be ready to serve your King.

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SEVEN

zac

I HAD TO hand it to East. The guy made things happen in a way I'd never seen before. I'd grown up around money, so it wasn't like I hadn't seen my fair share of wheeling and dealing, but the power East wielded at such a young age was staggering. I didn't even want to know how he'd managed to find information on King, or how he planned to get us inside the building, much less how we'd make a move.

But he'd told me to let him handle it all and to show up looking "sexy as fuck" in all black and ready for a wild night, so…there I was, waiting on the corner with my hands in the pockets of my tailored slacks and wondering if I was about to have the best time of my life or if this was all a monumental mistake.

I'd barely been able to look at King at school earlier, feeling like he'd see right through me or catch sight of the hard-on I'd sported just thinking about touching him. He'd been the star of my fantasies from the second I walked into his class years ago, and it'd only gotten worse. Now I knew how his deep voice sounded when he said my name. Knew the smell of his skin when he was close enough to touch. Watched the way he moved when his back was turned.

As confident as I felt about my skill between the sheets, though, there'd been no way in hell I was going to make a move on King, and he definitely wasn't looking my way. So really, I should be thanking East if this whole thing actually went down.

"Sexy as fuck indeed," East said from behind me, and let out a low whistle. "I should tell you how to dress more often."

He strolled in my direction with that ever-present smirk on his face, his black dress shirt unbuttoned down his chest. It was definitely not the pompous look I was accustomed to seeing, other than his perfectly smooth dark hair, and he looked really damn good, hardly like the uptight guy I knew—though he was still running his mouth in a way that made me want to fill it with my cock.

"Wow, look at you showing your neck," I said. "That's a first for you, huh?"

"All the better for you and our conquest to suck it."

"That's presumptuous, considering you'll be busy on your knees. *If* we can even get in this place."

East closed the gap between us until we were toe to toe. "Betting against me? I thought you were supposed to be a smart guy."

"I showed up here, didn't I? Even though this whole plan is insane."

"Feel free to leave. You'll miss out on a glorious night you'll never forget, but if you want to be a lame-ass—"

"All right, all right." He was so close I fisted his shirt in my hands to keep him right where I wanted him. Leaning in, I ghosted my lips over his—also a good way to shut him up—and said, "You win. Now show me what you're made of, *East*."

He grinned against my mouth before going to kiss me, but I took a nip of his lower lip before pushing him away.

"Get me King and maybe I'll let you have another taste."

Arousal flickered in his eyes. "Challenge accepted."

East headed in the direction of a plain black door that had no signage, no adornments, nothing to indicate what it was. I wouldn't have even noticed it was there with the way it blended in with the building around it, and maybe that was the point. No one would give it a second glance. But what the hell was waiting inside?

Anticipation flooded my body, because holy *shit*, what was about to go down tonight? Besides me, if East delivered.

He came to a stop in front of the door and looked around for the buzzer system, but there was nothing to indicate a way in. So he knocked, three loud pounds on the door with his fist, and when a full minute went by with our standing there in silence, he did it again.

"Maybe no one's home." I smirked.

He shot me a glare over his shoulder and knocked again. A small panel at eye height opened suddenly. A pair of brown eyes, the rest of the face hidden behind a mask, appeared through the thin slot. Whoever it was didn't say a word, but East was ready to charm his way past them.

Or what he considered to be charming and disarming, anyway.

A self-important smile curved his lips. "James Easton, and I've brought a guest."

That was it. That was all he said. Like his name was enough to gain us entry. Something that must usually work, considering he was an almost nightly VIP guest of all the hottest clubs and events in this city.

The eyes behind the door didn't blink, only stared at East before flicking to me briefly, and then back again.

The panel slammed shut and East turned back to me. "See, what'd I tell you? We're in."

I looked to the *still*-closed door, then back to East's slipping smirk. "Maybe they're having trouble with the locks?"

The death rays that shot from his eyes made me chuckle. "I just want you to know these smartass remarks of yours make you a little less attractive."

I slipped my hands into my pockets, and when East's eyes fell below my belt, I scoffed. "Yes, that's very clear."

East rolled his eyes and turned back to the seemingly impenetrable door, not about to concede defeat. He straightened his shoulders as though he were about to go into battle and raised his arm to knock again.

The small panel opened, brown eyes once again peering out at East as he tried what I assumed was his usual plan B.

"I'm sorry, but maybe you didn't catch the name? James Easton. Cover fees are no issue, my friend. I've got mine and my guest's, no problem."

If it had been anyone but East begging to be let in somewhere I might've felt sorry for what was clearly about to be round two of rejection. But it *was* East, and I couldn't help but enjoy this unlikely turn of events.

The panel slammed shut—again.

East cocked his head to the side as he stared at the shut door, and I couldn't help but wonder how many doors *he'd* slammed in people's faces. Maybe this would be a good wake-up call, letting him know that you couldn't always get what you want because of who you were.

“This is unbelievable.” He shook his head and turned back to face me, a confused look on his face. “Are they even hearing my name?”

Or maybe not.

“I’m pretty sure they can hear you. You’re standing right in front of them.”

“Then explain why they aren’t opening the door.”

I shrugged, enjoying his bewilderment a little too much. “I don’t know, maybe they don’t want to?”

“They don’t want to? Really? This is a club, for fuck’s sake. Pretty sure they want business, Zac.”

“Did it ever occur to you that they just don’t want yours?”

“No. Everyone wants my business. This doorman or guard dog must be new to New York. Maybe I need to be more aggressive.”

“More aggressive?”

“Yes. Clearly my charm and money haven’t impressed him. Maybe I just need to be direct.”

Oh God, I couldn’t even begin to imagine what East planned to say next. But as he steeled his shoulders like a man on a mission, I braced myself.

After a much heavier knock, the panel slid open, and while all I could see were the eyes, I could’ve sworn they looked…annoyed.

This wasn’t going to end well for East.

“Clearly you’re new in town, so I won’t tell your boss about this little mix-up. But if you could please let Tyrone Kingston know that James Easton would like access to the club, he can vouch for me.”

That ballsy motherfucker. Did he seriously just throw out King’s name like he was expecting us? The arrogance East exuded was mind-blowing and awe-inspiring at the same time. What did he plan to do if we did get inside? If we did see King? Just walk up and tell him we were there to fuck him?

I wouldn’t put it past him. But I thought he was going to be a little stealthier about it, that he’d have an actual plan.

Several seconds passed, then: denied. The panel slammed shut for a third time, and when several more seconds passed and nothing came of his request, East began to knock on the door again.

Nothing. The panel didn’t even open this time.

He tried again, and again, until he was knocking incessantly and finally I had to stop him. I reached for his hand, halting it as his knuckles were about to meet with the wood, and shook my head like one might at a petulant child.

“No more,” I said, tugging him back from the door. “It’s over. It was a good try, but it seems this is one place *the* James Easton can’t talk or buy his way into.”

East’s chin kicked up, his eyes shifting past my shoulder back to the door. “I don’t accept that.”

“Then you can spend the rest of the night out here on the street.” I turned on my heel, about to go and track down a ride home, when I heard my name.

East was still standing in front of the building, a baffled expression plastered all over his features. “I don’t understand what just happened.”

I walked back to him and clapped him on the shoulder. “You were rejected.”

“Rejected?”

“Yes. Turned down. Told no. You know, all those things that have probably never happened to you until right this very second.”

“I don’t like it.”

“Welcome to everyone else’s reality. Now, let’s go suck back a few shots, since we won’t be sucking on anything else tonight.”

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EIGHT

east

I DRUMMED MY fingers along the back of an empty seat as I watched the buildings surrounding Columbus Circle pass by. It wasn't often I was the lone passenger in the Sprinter, but I'd stopped by my father's office after classes to check out the new high-rise plans for downtown. He'd won the bid easily, because what other real estate magnates could compete with the company who'd designed Easton Tower, one of the preeminent buildings in the city?

It was why my name opened doors everywhere I went. Why people begged me to make an appearance, to give them publicity.

So what in God's name had happened on Friday night?

Yes, I was still stewing over it. It was the first and only time I'd ever had a door shut in my face—literally—and it'd only made me even more determined to figure out what was happening behind those closed doors.

What was that place? Who was the cockblocker behind the mask? What did King get up to there?

Ugh. The *rejection*, as Zac had called it, chafed. It just wouldn't do. No one turned me down and got away with it.

On the other hand, a place like that couldn't be so great if they didn't want someone like me there. And Zac wasn't exactly hard on the eyes either.

"Will you be going out tonight, Mr. Easton?" Scotty glanced at me in the rearview mirror.

"Hard to believe, but I think I should take the night off."

He nodded as he pulled in under the porte-cochère at the Waldorf Towers and brought the Sprinter to a stop. “Yes, sir. Let me know if that changes.”

One of the doormen rushed to open the van, and I grabbed my bag and stepped out. The guys and I had hit up a few clubs over the weekend, a good distraction to be sure, but tonight I wasn’t in the mood. I needed to find a new hacker if Harry couldn’t get me the information I needed.

As I made my way across the lobby’s marble floors, the reception attendant called out, “Mr. Easton, a moment.”

I arched a brow and headed over to her. “Good evening, Sophia. What can I do for you?”

She reached into a drawer and pulled out a plain manila envelope. “This arrived for you.”

“Why is it not with the rest of my mail?”

“We were told to give it to you directly.”

I took the envelope, stamped *confidential*. “Who dropped this off?”

“I’m not sure. It arrived during Dave’s shift, and when I asked, he said it seemed like a hired bike messenger.”

I screwed my nose up. A bike messenger? It couldn’t be anything important, then. But curiosity over what I’d find inside won out, so I thanked Sophia and headed to the elevator to open it privately.

Once the doors closed, I opened the tab and pulled out a black envelope with my name in handwritten script on the front. Red wax stamped on the back closure contained a symbol I didn’t recognize, and my brow furrowed.

What is this? A party invite?

I flipped it back over and stared at the gold swirl of my name. If it *was* some kind of party, surely I would’ve heard talk of it, especially of one going to this kind of expense to get me there.

It did, however, make sense. *Unlike* what happened on Friday. Of course I was being invited somewhere high class and ostentatious, and with a special invitation, no less. That was the kind of respect my name deserved.

I wonder if the rest of our group got one too?

I tossed my key card on the entry table and was about to open up the mysterious letter when I spotted West sitting on the couch. He had the TV on and was flipping through the streaming services.

“Hey, little late getting home, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Unfortunately. Father wanted to go over some plans he wants me to work with him on, and you know how he gets when he talks business.”

“Mind-numbingly boring?”

“I was thinking more specific and long-winded. I wanted to see the next building that will carry my family name, and he wanted to impress me with every single detail of the phenomenal deal he made.”

“And were you impressed?”

“Pretty sure I fell asleep with my eyes open.”

West smirked and tossed the remote on the couch, his gaze falling to the envelopes in my hand. “Whatcha got there?”

Wait, he didn’t get one? Now I was intrigued. I had no idea what I was holding. Who was sending me invitations and not my friends? We were kind of a package deal, though truth be told, I was the standout. The leader. It was common knowledge.

“Just something from my father, that’s all.” Don’t ask me why I was lying. West was my best friend and had so much dirt on me he could bury me six feet under. But something about this told me to keep my mouth shut.

Not something I generally did of my own free will.

“Gotcha. You planning to stay in tonight or heading out with the rest of us?”

Even before I’d been handed the letter—which was practically burning a hole in my palm—I’d decided to stay in tonight, but now it was a no-brainer. I was going to have dinner sent up, open this letter, and work out who had sent it and what it was all about.

“I think I’m just going to have a quiet night in.”

West’s brow shot up. “Seriously?”

“I sometimes do that, you know.”

“Since when?”

“Since you all paired up and became nauseating to be around. I’d like one night where I can enjoy a bottle of Beluga without having to control my churning stomach.”

He should buy that. It was the truth, just a little exaggerated.

“One of these days—”

“I’m leaving now,” I sang as I walked down the hall toward my bedroom.

“You’re going to meet someone,” West continued, “and fall—”

I slammed my door shut.

I leaned back against it and traced my finger around the sharp edges of the envelope, then tossed the package it came in on my bureau.

My curiosity was running rampant now, the suspense killing me as I toed off my loafers and headed to my bed. Once I was comfortable, I looked at the intricate wax seal on the back. There was a pattern there, one I didn't recognize, and I grabbed my phone to take a photo so I could investigate it even after I opened it.

Who had sent this? Who used a wax fucking seal on an envelope these days? And who knew where I lived and how to get this personally delivered to me?

My heart thumped as I slipped my finger under the edge and ran it down to the seal. It broke in half and I pulled the letter free, and what I saw there made it beat even harder.

James Easton,
On Friday, March 15th at midnight, a car will be sent to pick you up.
It's up to you if you choose to accept the ride.

That was it.

That was all it said. The message was in the same gold script that my name had been written in, and it was signed by no one.

What in the fresh hell was going on? Was this some sort of prank? Some kind of payback by someone I had slighted? It could happen. One didn't become, well, *me* without racking up some enemies. But this didn't feel like a prank. It felt important and screamed money.

But who was more important and richer than I was?

I grabbed my laptop and did an image search on the symbol. When nothing came up, I sighed in annoyance and sent the photo to Harry.

Stop what you're doing and tell me what this symbol is and who it belongs to. Confidential, obviously

Yes, I had commandeered the hacker West had found back when he was stalking his Golden Boy. I needed access and information at all times, so he was now at my personal beck and call. It wasn't long before Harry sent a response.

HARRY THE HACKER:

Initial search comes up empty. Running another now, but the symbol is probably someone's personal, handmade design and wouldn't show up online.

Wow, that was incredibly *not* helpful, which seemed to be the case with him lately. I really did need a new hacker.

I slammed the laptop shut, tossed my phone aside, and leaned back against the pillows to study the invitation again.

It's up to you if you choose to accept the ride.

Ride from whom? To where? I didn't like being left in the dark.

I also couldn't deny the instructions left me more than a little intrigued.

I tapped the invitation against my palm. *Decisions, decisions…*

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NINE

zac

THE INVITATION I'D received earlier in the week was odd, that was for sure. Part of me had wanted to ask East about it, since if it was for a party, surely he'd have heard something.

It didn't *seem* like a party, though. More like an invite to join a fraternity. But since I was a few weeks out from finishing my master's, that couldn't be the case either. My interest was piqued enough that it had stayed on my mind the last few days.

By the time Friday night rolled around, I'd finished my shift at The Cellar, one of my family's chain of high-end restaurants, grabbed a shower at my place, and debated whether it was a smart idea to head downstairs to see who arrived.

I didn't even know what the dress code would be if I took up the offer, since I had no idea where we'd be going. The safe bet was always to overdress rather than throw on whatever sweats were lying around. I doubted anyone using a wax seal was the t-shirt and jeans type.

All black it was. Since I hadn't gotten any use out of the outfit I'd worn when East begged to get inside the nonexistent club, I threw it on. It'd gotten a reaction out of him, after all, and East was a picky bastard. If it was good enough for his tastes, it'd be good enough for wherever I was going.

This is fucking crazy, I thought as I headed down to the lobby of my Upper West Side apartment. With Central Park across the street, it was the perfect location for me, since early morning runs kept my head clear and my body in the best shape of my life.

The doorman nodded at me as I walked out into the chilly night. It wasn't the cold that made me shiver, though, but the plum-colored Rolls-Royce Phantom that slowed to a stop along the sidewalk directly in front of me.

Holy shit. Is that for me? No way…

The driver stepped out, came around to the side of the car, took hold of the door handle, and looked at me expectantly.

"Will you be accepting the offer, Mr. Fletcher?"

Well, I guess that answered the *is it for me?* question, but how? Who? Why? I didn't recognize the man dressed in a pristine black suit, cap, and white gloves, but maybe he'd give me a little more information before I got into the most expensive car that had ever picked me up.

Like I'd turn down a ride in *that.*

"Who is the offer from?" I asked.

Silence.

"Can you at least tell me where I'll be going?"

The driver simply looked at me, staying silent. What was so confidential he couldn't tell me?

He glanced at his watch, then at me, and when I didn't make a move to get in, he straightened his cap and started to walk off.

"Wait," I said. This was insane. I knew that. But damn if curiosity—and the amazing limo—didn't win out over my rationality.

I started toward the car, and he opened the door, letting me inside, but the second I realized I wasn't the only one he'd picked up tonight, the door was slammed shut behind me.

"What the hell?" I was still half standing as I stared at East, who had his feet kicked up on the reclining seat, lounging there like he owned the place.

Shit, *did* he own it?

The way his eyes widened when he saw me, though, told me that he hadn't been expecting me.

"Well, well, well." He held up his invitation. "I'm guessing you didn't send this?"

"Uh, no. How do I know *you* didn't send it?"

"Because while I'm all about a good prank, I know I can get your ass for free. I wouldn't shell out half a mill for the pleasure."

"Half a mill?"

“The car.” East gestured to the luxurious inside of the vehicle. “That’s what one of these costs.”

Fucking hell, was he serious? Half a million dollars? For a *car*? I guess I shouldn’t be all that surprised, considering East, but I didn’t run with that crowd. There was no way someone was sending a car like this for me.

“Are you going to sit down or stand the entire way?”

I took a seat in the empty recliner and eyed him across the teched-out console that had every bell and whistle known to man. Including a digital screen and a spot for our drinks.

Across from us were two more recliners and a makeshift bar with a bottle of champagne on ice and a crystal decanter filled with what I assumed was top-shelf whiskey.

“All right, out with it,” I said, still not convinced this wasn’t all East’s doing. “Where are we going?”

“I told you, I’m as clueless as you are.”

“So you, James Easton, the son of one of the wealthiest men in Manhattan, willingly climbed into a vehicle not having a clue where it was taking you?”

East seemed to ponder that for a moment, and just as he was about to answer, the Phantom purred to life and pulled away from the curb.

“What can I say? It seemed like a good adventure.”

“A good adventure?” I shook my head at his blasé tone. “What if someone is trying to kidnap you? Or do something nefarious?”

East let out a loud scoff. “Then looks like you’re coming along for the ride. Remember, we did *choose* to be here. That was what was written on the invitation.”

“Something they might’ve known you couldn’t resist.”

“Oh for the love of— Are you going to be a Debbie Downer all night? Because if so, I’m going to ask our driver to stop and kick you out. *I* chose to be here because I was looking for something exciting to do with my evening—other than you, of course.”

I rolled my eyes and sat back. “Of course. All I’m saying is, how do you know wherever we’re being taken is safe?”

“How do *you*? How about you turn off that big brain of yours and enjoy whatever is about to happen. Clearly you showed up because you were curious, so don’t get all rational on me now.”

He had a point, but I wasn't the one who would garner a lot of attention if I went missing. Then again, most people didn't go missing in the back of a half-million-dollar limousine with a chauffeur.

Shit, maybe East was right and I should just shut off my brain and enjoy whatever this was.

"Mr. Easton. Mr. Fletcher." The no-nonsense voice that filtered through the speakers caught our attention. "Beside each of your seats you will find a tablet and a pen. On the screen there is a folder with today's date on it. Inside, you will find a secured file with your name on it. Tap on your document, enter the last four digits of your social security number, and you'll gain access to the NDA that you must sign before we continue."

"Excuse me?" East said. "Did you just say enter my social *security* number? How the fuck do you know that?"

"Enter the last four digits to access the NDA," the driver replied. "If you do not, your evening will end here."

Your choice. He didn't say it, but it was heavily implied.

East glanced over at me, and I finally caught a flicker of concern in his eyes.

What the hell was going on? Who were we dealing with?

I was about to tell East we should just leave, but then his eyes flicked back to his tablet and he clicked open the folder. Seconds later he put the tablet down and said, "Well, you going to bail, or…"

I took in a deep breath and opened my file, and as I started to read it, East groaned and flopped back in his seat.

"It's an NDA—it's basically saying you won't say shit about whatever goes on tonight. Have you never read one?"

"I've never read *this* one."

"Oh my God."

I ignored his grumblings and continued to read through the three pages, and when I got to the bottom and signed, East slow-clapped.

"About time. I'd like to enjoy whatever this is while I'm still young enough."

"Quit complaining, I just wanted to—"

The intercom came to life again. "Now that you've signed the necessary forms, you'll find the final item needed for tonight located in the console between you. Once you have complied, we will continue."

I glanced down at the console, then back to East. “I’m almost scared to look.”

He, of course, was not. East opened up the console, and inside were two black blindfolds. A wicked chuckle escaped him as he picked one up and dangled it in front of me. “Hmm, this bodes well.”

“Bodes well? I’m still not convinced we aren’t being kidnapped.”

“Zac, that isn’t the only time people use a blindfold.”

“Yes, but it is one.”

“So is sex. That’s a fifty-fifty chance that we won’t be kidnapped and will instead end the night with an orgasm. Me? I like those odds.”

“Of course you do.”

“So how about it? Are you going to let me tie this on for you?”

I eyed the black strip of silk, my heart thudding a little faster. Was I really about to do this?

“How do I know you won’t bail the second it’s on? That you aren’t really behind all of this?”

“Because I wouldn’t lie to you.” East leaned in a little closer and licked his lips. “Now, do you trust me?”

Something about the direct way he held my gaze made me think I could —and surprisingly, I did.

“Yes. I trust you.”

“Good, then turn your head.”

I turned away from him, staring out at the city lights flashing by in a blur, and as they disappeared behind the black silky fabric, I swallowed. My stomach flipped as East knotted the blindfold at the back of my head.

“Ready or not, it’s time to go down the rabbit hole, Alice.”

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TEN

east

THIS BLINDFOLD BETTER mean there's about to be some kinky fuckery going down.

I didn't usually give anyone else control—well, outside of the bedroom—which was the only reason I'd agreed to sign my life away and sit in the back of this insanely expensive limo…blindfolded.

Zac wasn't wrong—there *was* a high possibility we were being driven to some dingy warehouse over by the Hudson River where we could be tied up and held for ransom. But I was betting on my prediction being likelier. The one that made the most sense, considering the lengths our hosts, whoever they were, had gone to in an effort to seduce us.

A sex club.

Besides, if someone was out to kidnap me, why would Zac be here too? Yes, I was almost certain I was right, and if I wasn't—well, my father had enough money to pay my ransom.

As the limo continued on, I let my mind go wild with possibilities. If this was indeed a sex club, it wouldn't be the first I'd gone to. It was the most unique, though, and I would be sure to let them know that. It was always important to be a standout in Manhattan, and I was sure the owners would appreciate my feedback.

"I've never heard you this quiet before," Zac said. "Having second thoughts?"

"Not one. You?"

"Only about a million."

That was hardly a surprise. Zac was a worrier by nature, which was cute, when he wasn't rushing my orgasm or abruptly ending his own. Which is why we'd—for the most part—kept our hookups off campus.

Until our recent run-in with Professor Kingston. *Whoops*.

"Well, stop. If worse comes to worst, they'll add some handcuffs and call my father."

"Now that really *would* be worse if this is a sex club."

"Ah, I see you're not worried enough to have lost your sense of humor. I *meant*, they would call him to procure our release."

I could almost hear Zac's eyes roll as the limo drew to a stop.

The driver's door was opened, and my ears pricked up, wondering if I could somehow work out where we were by ambient sounds. But then I realized this wasn't a movie and I needed to stop being so damn ridiculous.

"Did you hear that?"

Seemed I wasn't the only one imagining I had superhuman hearing. "What?"

"We've stopped. He got out. I can hear him walking around—"

The door beside Zac opened and a rush of cool night air entered the limo. "We've arrived," the driver said. "Keep your blindfolds on or this ends."

No problem there. I'd gotten out of enough limos in my life to gracefully make my exit, even blindfolded. Zac, on the other hand…

"Shit." There was a thud and then another curse as he moved ahead of me.

"Careful. You don't want the only bruises you get tonight to be from being unable to get out of the vehicle."

Zac threw another curse over his shoulder, clearly directed at me, and kept moving, eventually stumbling his way outside.

I felt for the door opening and carefully stepped out, but a gust of cold wind nearly knocked me over, and I smashed into Zac. His hands caught me by the waist, and lingered there as I found my footing.

"You good?" he asked. I wasn't sure if he even noticed the way his thumbs swept back and forth in a soothing motion, but it felt nice. Too nice.

"Fine." I backed away, and he dropped his arms.

"There will be stairs inside," the driver said. "You'll both be given guides. Do not speak to them. They will not speak to you. Understood?"

This driver was a bossy fucker. No way in hell would my driver be throwing orders around like he was.

“Sir, yes, sir,” I smartassed as the wind kicked up again. Damn it was cold. We’d better not be pitching a tent outside, or I was out.

“Understood,” Zac said.

“Good. They’ll hold on to you, not the other way around.” To emphasize that point, a firm hand grabbed my bicep. “Let’s get going.”

That seemed to be directed more to our guides than to us, and as mine began to move, my first instinct was to rebel, to jerk out of his grip, rip off my blindfold, and tell them all to fuck off. Instead, I took in a deep lungful of air and let the stranger lead me out of the wind and into what felt like an enclosed space. A door shut behind us, sending an echo through the room.

Sex club, sex club, sex club.

It was so silent all I could hear was the pounding of my heart as it quickened in anticipation, and then the shuffling of feet as we began to move again, down stairs and then long halls that grew chillier as we descended. When we got to the bottom of one set of stairs and began to move again, there was a low flickering sound and warmth that reached my cheeks every few feet. Candles? Torches, maybe?

Still we walked, and the urge to toss out a remark about how long it was taking was so strong I had to literally bite my tongue. Maybe this *had* been a bad idea. What if we were willingly allowing ourselves to be taken to the bowels of some filth-infested building where we’d be buried alive?

We came to a stop, something heavy creaked open, and as we were pulled inside, I sniffed at the air.

Wherever we were now, it wasn’t filth-infested. It smelled…really fucking good, actually. As we walked, we drifted through clouds of expensive men’s cologne, one after the other, and the flickering noise grew louder, the only sound I could hear.

My handler brought me to a stop, whispered, “Stay,” and then let go of my arm.

Stay? Like I was a fucking dog? What was next, roll over?

The sound of retreating footsteps echoed around me, even as I felt the presence of another stop beside me—Zac.

Apparently we’d arrived at our final destination, and all I could think was that hopefully it wasn’t *truly* final.

I rubbed my hands on the sides of my pants, my usual confidence waning slightly now that we were about to find out where we were and why. What if this had been a monumental mistake? What if Zac had been right? No one knew where I was, not even my friends. West thought I'd gone to Onyx for the night.

But now wasn't the time to freak out. I needed to trust my gut, trust my instincts, because they'd never led me wrong in the past. Well, not much, anyway.

The heavy sound of a door closing, followed by a louder, much more sinister bolt or lock, vibrated through the room, and then…silence.

Had everyone left? Was I alone? I shifted a little to the right, and when my hand brushed against a sleeve, I knew Zac was still there.

Thank God.

"Remove your blindfolds."

The commanding voice that issued the order was deep, powerful, and full of authority. It left no room for disobedience, and as I reached for my blindfold and finally drew it off my head, my eyes struggled to adjust to the flickering lights surrounding us.

A blur of figures came into focus, and I blinked several times, trying to make sense of what I was seeing, but the room was full of shadows. The torches—that was where the heat was coming from—only offered up glimpses of what was in front of me.

My heart thundered as I snuck a glance to my right to see Zac removing his blindfold, and when my eyes finally cleared, I turned back to see seven cloaked figures standing in front of us.

Each was draped in an intricately textured robe that fell in heavy, cascading folds from their shoulders to the floor, obscuring their forms completely. The hoods were pulled low, casting deep shadows over their masked faces. The only visible parts of their bodies were their eyes.

Even with our blindfolds gone, whoever these people were wanted to continue concealing their identities.

Who the fuck were they? And what was this place?

I didn't even have time to hazard a guess, because the towering figure in the center stepped forward. They reached for the edges of their mask and in one smooth move slid it up onto their head, making the hood fall free.

My pulse kicked up several notches as the man behind the mask came into view and I found myself face to face with Professor Kingston.

“I heard you were looking for me.”

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ELEVEN

zac

I STOPPED BREATHING.

The second King's face filled my vision, my ears began to ring as shock overwhelmed me.

His was a face I'd looked at so many times, studying his features when he wasn't looking. Skin the color of smooth, rich mahogany, close-cropped black curls, and a jaw line that could cut glass, even with the perfectly styled hair that lined it.

And those eyes. They were a dark, mysterious brown, carrying secrets I'd never imagined would lead me into…a basement? No, that wasn't the right description for this place, and the stillness of East beside me told me just how surprised he was at the turn of events.

"I heard you were looking for me," King said, and my gaze snapped back up to his.

My cheeks immediately warmed, partly from embarrassment but mostly because I'd never seen him look at me with such intensity before. King was an intimidating guy as it was, always commanding attention when he walked in a room, but this? Now? It was a miracle my knees weren't buckling.

"Yes," East said, finding his voice before I could think to answer. "We were—"

"Stop talking."

To my amazement, East immediately shut his mouth. That might've been the first and only time that had happened. Ever.

King looked between us. “Down here, you don’t speak to me until I tell you to. Understood?”

It was insane the way his rich timbre shot straight to my cock, but I didn’t dare move other than to nod my agreement.

East, on the other hand, tensed, his lips parting like he wanted to respond to that, but then he also gave a clipped nod.

“Understandably, you have questions,” King said. “Remember that anything you see or hear should never be discussed outside of these walls and that you signed a strict NDA to prevent you from doing so.”

Oh God.

With those words, gone was any anxiety over something unwanted happening here tonight. In its place came an anticipation that coiled low in my belly before making its way to my cock.

“We’ve brought you here because each of you possesses qualities that would be beneficial to our cause. In time, you’ll learn more about who we are and what your place among us could be, but for now all you need to know is that we’re men with a common goal. The pursuit of power, money, and influence.”

My gaze dropped to the clasp at King’s neck, the same ornate symbol that had been on the wax seal, only in gold. So this was a sort of secret society, then? And he was, what, the leader?

What the hell was happening right now? I felt like my entire world had been turned upside down in a handful of seconds. The only thing that was even slightly normal was East, and *that* was scaring the shit out of me.

“With your graduations on the horizon, we decided now would be the perfect recruitment period for the two of you. A trial, you might say, before you can be initiated as members.”

Recruitment? Trials? Jesus, who knew what that might include? And considering we were standing in a locked cavern, I didn’t imagine it was a presentation at a board meeting with the higher-ups.

Oh no, the higher-ups were all standing behind King, shrouded in cloaks and mystery, their faces still hidden from view as East and I stood all but paralyzed in place. The only things they were missing were daggers.

Unless they were hiding them.

“Questions?” King said. “I know you must have many, but right now you get one each.”

He expected us to speak? I wasn’t even sure I remembered how to.

“So this isn’t a sex club?”

I whipped my head in East’s direction, hardly believing my own ears, as someone *other* than the three of us muffled what sounded like a chuckle.

King’s shoulders stiffened, that impressive robe flowing down around his broad shoulders like a waterfall as he moved directly in front of East.

“No, James. This is not a sex club. It’s a place that requires you to think before you open your mouth, and you respect that you are not above the rules set in place. Is that something you think you’re capable of?”

I could tell by King’s tone he was highly doubtful, and with good reason. He knew East and had reprimanded him more times than I could count. So what in the hell made him think East was about to change now?

“James?”

That rumbly, cock-stroking tone might do it.

“I guess.” East tried to peer around King’s shoulders, but it was no use. The guy was built like a brick wall. “If I don’t you’ll just kick me out, right? I won’t go missing or anything?”

King’s jaw twitched once, twice, and then he took a step toward East, and I sucked in a breath.

“*This* is not a game. It is not some joke or one of your silly schoolboy pranks. In here, you will show respect or you will be shown the door. So I’m going to ask you again: are you capable of following the rules?”

My eyes darted between East and King, and I saw the way East’s Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed, the air in the room growing thick with tension as the two squared off. But not even East could deny the power King exuded in that moment, and quickly backed down.

“Yes. I can follow the rules.”

King’s eyes narrowed. “We’ll see. Stand there and don’t talk again until you are told to. It’s Zac’s turn.”

Though there was nothing sexual in what King said, my dick stood up as though it were ready to shake his hand.

Please don’t look below my waist. Please don’t look below my waist.

King moved in front of me, and while my first instinct was to lower my gaze, I didn’t want his to follow. So instead, I stared him directly in the eye.

That was a mistake, a monumental fucking mistake, because his intense gaze had my cock throbbing even harder.

“Zac.” King’s voice was completely different as my name rolled off his tongue, the gravelly cadence like the purr of a contented animal.

Oh God, now I was thinking of him like some sort of beast I wanted to pet. *Get a grip, Zac.*

“Now, I know you can follow rules, specifically ones I set for you.”

That clinched it. Everything he said sounded sexual. My brain had short-circuited somewhere around the moment he took his mask and hood off and revealed himself as a hell of a lot more than my professor.

“So we don’t need to go over that. But tell me, do you have a question you’d like to ask?”

A question… A question…

“Why me?”

King’s lips crooked up at the side, and my heart almost stopped. “Why *not* you?”

I studied him for a moment, and the only sound in the room was the blood ringing in my ears as I dared to say, “That’s not an answer…sir.”

“No, it is not.” He glanced down my body, and there was no way to hide what I knew he would see, so I didn’t even try. “But I never promised you an answer. I just said you could ask a question.”

When those dark eyes traveled back up to lock with mine, I could’ve sworn I saw a flicker of…*interest* there. But then it was gone.

King moved back to his original position between East and me, the six figures behind him as silent and still as statues.

“Do I have your attention now, gentlemen?”

We nodded, not daring to speak until we were told to, and the fact that East remained silent spoke volumes as to how much he wanted whatever it was King was offering.

“So, should we continue this conversation, or would you like to leave?”

“I’d like to continue,” East said.

I didn’t even know what I was agreeing to, but I was in. “So would I.”

“Good,” King said, then turned on his heel. “Now, walk with me.”

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TWELVE

king

I WAS NOT a man prone to impulse. I took my time with every decision, carefully weighing the consequences for days, months. Sometimes even years. And while I'd kept an eye on the two men trailing behind me as I led them into an adjacent—more private—room, it had been a rather impulsive decision to bring them here tonight. What I'd said about their possessing qualities that would benefit us was true, but the original plan had been to watch them as they graduated and began to make their moves in the real world.

My hand had been forced, though, the moment they showed up where they shouldn't have been, asking for me by name. That told me two things: one, that they'd had me followed, and two, that they were both more cunning and clever than I'd given them credit for.

Impressive, really. Just the sort of thing I admired in someone, though having them looking into things they shouldn't simply wouldn't do.

So it was an impulsive move on my part to send them an invitation. The fact that they'd both risen to the challenge surprised me more than it should. Now that they were here, though, I wanted to know the answer to a question I'd been pondering for a week.

The door to the throne room, as we called it, shut behind us, leaving the three of us alone. The whispered curses that echoed around the cavernous space were to be expected as I led them up toward the seven high-back black throne chairs that sat upon a raised dais.

"Have a seat, if you wish." I gestured toward the smaller, tufted velvet throne benches that faced the dais, and continued up to my seat at the center

of the chairs. “You may speak freely in here.”

I unfastened the clasp of my cloak and whipped it off. I laid it over the arm of the chair beside mine, then looked up to see that Zac and East remained standing where I’d left them, wearing matching looks of *what the hell is happening* on their handsome faces.

I could admit that here, that they were both attractive. As their professor, it wasn’t an appropriate thought to have.

Which brought me back to what I wanted to know.

“A week ago, the two of you went to an undisclosed location in the city and demanded to be let in. Then you asked for me by name.” I took a seat and cocked my head to the side. “Why?”

The instant flush to Zac’s cheeks was interesting. It was the second time tonight that he’d blushed, and I couldn’t deny how appealing that was. He was hiding something, and as I turned my attention to East, I raised a brow. Now here was a guy who didn’t possess such a filter.

“I don’t like being denied a good time,” he said, a stubborn tilt to his jaw. “And I wanted to know what was inside.”

“Because you’d seen me enter?”

“Yes.”

“So you followed me?”

East waved his hand dismissively. “I don’t have time for that.”

“Then you hired someone to follow me.”

“Yes.”

At least he was honest. “Why?”

“I can speak freely?”

“Yes.”

He gave an impish shrug. “Zac wants you to fuck him.”

“*East!*”

It was the first word that had come out of Zac’s mouth since we’d entered the room, and the blush marring his cheeks seconds ago turned scarlet.

“What?” East looked completely unbothered by Zac’s reaction. “It’s true.”

“Oh my God,” Zac muttered, his eyes dropping to the floor, and while I could understand his embarrassment, this new piece of information was intriguing.

“Zac?” I asked.

He shook his head, continuing to mutter, and I was almost positive he was promising to kill East. I understood the urge. I'd often wanted to strangle the little shit myself.

"Zac? Look at me." He finally raised his head. "Is what he said true?"

Zac's wide-eyed stare told me it was, but for some unknown reason, I wanted to hear it from my studious TA's mouth.

A mouth that up until now, I'd never allowed myself to notice. *Much.*

"It's…" Zac looked at East. "I hate you."

"Not news. That's how we ended up in this predicament."

That was an interesting comment, but I was too focused on the man in front of me to deviate from my course. I wanted an answer to my question. For some reason, I *needed* it.

"Zac? I asked you a question."

"I know." Zac's eyes came back to mine, and the intelligence I so admired in him flickered in their depths. "But I didn't promise an answer."

I gave a curt nod and propped my ankle up on my knee, drumming my fingers along my thigh. "That's true, but if you can't be honest, you might as well leave now."

East snorted. "Is that another one of your *rules*? It's amazing how they seem to all work to your advantage."

"It works to everyone's advantage. If you ask me something, I will always answer honestly, unless—"

"You don't want to answer at all?"

"*Can't* is a more apt term, but yes."

"Okay, well, how about this, then," East said, slyly smiling. "You ever thought about fucking Zac?"

If East thought he could shock me, he was in for bitter disappointment. I slowly turned my head in Zac's direction. "Not until tonight."

"Told you," East sang as I continued to stare Zac down, waiting for him to speak. "Didn't I say I just needed to get you in front of him?"

Again, Zac said nothing. But he didn't need to. East was all too happy to spill their naughty little secrets.

"So what was your master plan?" I asked him. "Get Zac in front of me, tell me to fuck him, and you would just, what…watch?"

"Originally, yes. But it's hardly fair Zac gets all the payoff when *I'm* the one that did all the work. After all, I was the one who found you."

East's bold, assessing once-over was more confident than most of the men I'd been with. Something that was as stimulating as it was irritating.

"Actually, I believe I'm the one who contacted the two of you," I said.

"So is that a yes to the sex, then?"

I didn't respond, choosing instead to return my attention to the silent one in the room. "Is that want you want, Zac? Sex. With me?"

Zac's lips parted, shiny, wet, and now begging for attention, and I didn't need to look below his waist to know his earlier erection would still be prominent. At first I'd been curious what had set him off, but now it all made sense.

The only question that remained was, would he admit it?

"Yes."

He answered without hesitation, and that one word from his obedient mouth had me rethinking this entire night.

Another impulsive decision on my part. I hadn't brought them here for sex. I'd wrongly assumed they'd found out who I was and wanted in on aligning themselves with some of the most powerful men in the world.

But this? Yet again they'd surprised me by wanting nothing more than a hot night. With *me*.

I propped an elbow on the chair's arm and stroked my chin as I let my gaze wander over the two of them. East was the taller of the two, though not by much, and both of them had lean, athletic bodies. Zac wasn't wearing his glasses tonight, and it put his blue eyes on full display, making it easier to read the little flashes of emotion that passed through them. Unlike East, who didn't seem to show what he felt as much as he said it.

They were a captivating pair, that much was clear.

"You two are together?" I asked, remembering the way I'd caught them slipping out of the same empty room the other morning at Astor.

East answered first. "Uh, no."

"Are you sure?"

"We're not dating. We just…hook up occasionally."

That made more sense. They had always seemed such polar opposites, and on more than one occasion Zac had grumbled under his breath about "that pain in the ass." I knew firsthand how tension could change into something more.

"And you want to 'hook up' with me?" I said.

“I mean, that was the plan,” East mumbled. “But you seem hellbent on talking.”

What I wouldn’t do to bend that smartass over my knee.

But I couldn’t. They were still students at Astor, and it would be wrong to take advantage of this situation in the way they were all but begging me to. The way my cock suddenly wanted to.

Nothing said I couldn’t be an inactive participant, though.

I got to my feet, took their chins in each hand, and brushed my thumbs over their pouty lower lips, briefly wondering if I was insane to allow what I was about to.

“New plan.” I dropped my hands and shoved them in my pockets so I wouldn’t be tempted to do more. “I’ll watch.”

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THIRTEEN

king

“YOU’LL WATCH…?” EAST asked.

I inclined my head. “The two of you. I assume since the plan was to hook up with me that you brought what you need for that to happen?”

East looked at Zac whose eyes were practically boring a hole through me, then nodded.

“Yes. I’m always prepared. But that wasn’t the—”

“We’ll do it,” Zac said with the same determination he showed whenever attacking a particular challenge he needed to overcome, the nerves and embarrassment suddenly vanishing under this new deal I’d just put on the table.

“We will?” East leaned in and whispered something in Zac’s ear, but whatever it was didn’t seem to deter Zac, whose eyes stayed locked on mine. “Okay, it was your fantasy.”

“Fantasies can change.”

“And is that what’s happened?” I asked Zac. “Has *your* fantasy changed?”

“No. But since that’s not available to me, I’m adapting.”

Yes he was. I could see his mind working overtime as it readjusted to this new scenario. Zac was a smart man, and as I returned to my seat I watched him survey the room, noting everything in sight: the seven chairs and the stone symbol carved into the wall above them, the torches that illuminated the sacred space, and the velvet benches for other members when needed.

I knew exactly what he was thinking.

“So, will you be a silent party in this whole scenario?” East asked. “Or will you be giving—”

“The benches,” I said in answer to both the silent and voiced question in the room. “Bend him over one of the benches.”

“Oh, so that’s how it’s going to go,” East said, taking a step forward, but my eyes were on the man behind him. “You’re going to sit up there on your throne and—”

Zac reached out fast as a whip, and a second later his mouth was crashing down on East’s, silencing him. A thrill shot straight to my dick at the fierce way he took control of the situation, his other hand moving to the back of East’s neck as he thrust his tongue inside that acerbic mouth.

It shouldn’t have surprised me to see Zac assert himself in such a way—he often had to employ an authoritative tone in my absence. But to watch it break free in such a sexual situation was making my cock harder than I’d ever imagined it could be. So was the way he’d managed to capture and hold East’s attention. Not an easy thing to do with the most domineering of the “princes.” But Zac had worked out a way to get under that haughty exterior, and I was more than ready to watch how.

I knew what I was doing was wrong, that there was no scenario in which I should be watching two of my students fuck, even if it was outside Astor. But when East slid his hands around to Zac’s ass, I wasn’t about to stop them.

Zac ran his hand up through the back of East’s hair and tightened it in his fist, and a second later, he tugged their mouths free. The two looked at me then, and the heat and arousal swirling in their eyes had me spreading my legs wide to make sure they could see that I was right there with them.

East smoothed a hand down Zac’s chest and tugged his shirt free, then unbuttoned it and pushed it from his shoulders. As the material fell to the floor, I drank in Zac’s toned physique and marveled at the body I’d never allowed myself to think about. His tight, rigid abs, the sharp cut of the V that tapered down into his pants, and a delicious treasure trail that East was running his fingers through.

Zac sucked in a breath as East flicked open the button of his pants, and when he unzipped him, I mirrored the action.

“Fuck yes,” East said, licking his lips. “Let us see that big cock of yours.”

“Finish taking off Zac’s clothes and I might let you.”

East didn’t hesitate, slipping his fingers inside the waistband of Zac’s pants and briefs and pulling them to the floor. Zac’s cock sprang free, and his attention immediately fell to East, who was kneeling at his feet, licking a path up the underside of it.

Jesus Christ. What had I gotten myself into? These two were sex personified as they began to show me exactly what they liked about “hooking up” together. It was impossible to look away—not that I wanted to—as Zac began to rock his hips forward and demand that East do more—and to my shock, he was only too eager to obey.

East’s lips parted around the wide head of Zac’s dick, and he swallowed it in one practiced move. Zac moaned as his head fell back, squeezing his eyes shut, the pleasure of being sucked so hard making his hips thrust a little faster.

I stroked my palm down over the tight fabric of my pants, my erection threatening to burst through at any moment. But watching the two of them greedily steal their pleasure right in front of me was a temptation even I couldn’t ignore, and I knew right then that watching was not going to be enough.

With their attention on each other, I groaned and Zac’s eyes opened and zeroed in on mine.

I wrapped my hand around my thick length as Zac’s gaze burned a fiery path down to my dick and his nostrils flared. His fantasy tonight had been for me to fuck him, and I knew he was imagining it right now as I shoved my cock through my fist, letting him get a good look at my size and girth.

Zac licked along his lower lip, the hand he had in East’s hair getting a little tighter with each thrust. But now that I was a part of this, now that it was happening, I was going to call the shots.

I ran my eyes down to where East knelt, his mouth full, his hands braced on Zac’s thighs, and while his ass looked really good in his tailored pants, I had a feeling it would look even better naked.

“Strip him,” I ordered Zac in a voice that had both men looking over at me, and when East caught sight of my bared dick, he quickly got to his feet.

“Of course you unveil that monster while my back’s turned,” he said as Zac unfastened his buttons and shoved his shirt aside. But before his pants were removed, East pulled out his wallet and handed Zac a couple of small packets, all the while eyeing my pumping fist.

My lips twitched despite my aroused state. “I didn’t want to interrupt you. You seemed to be enjoying what you were doing, and as you can tell, so was I.”

He said nothing to that as the final piece of his clothing was removed, and I ran my gaze up his legs to his eager cock, which seemed as hungry for attention as its owner.

East’s body was as beautiful as Zac’s, but different in so many ways. He was slightly taller and broader than Zac, and where Zac’s muscles were sharper, more defined, East’s body had an elegance about it. He was long and lean, and I was curious about what he did to keep in shape. But that wasn’t a conversation we were about to have here.

“And now?” East gripped his dick and gave it a rough pull. “Are you enjoying what I’m doing *now*?”

“Yes. But you’re not running this show. I am.” I cut my eyes to the bench beside him. “So kneel and bend over that. Eyes on me.”

East bristled slightly, but he was too turned on to really push back. Instead, he moved behind the black velvet bench and sank to his knees. Zac immediately moved in behind him, understanding exactly what his role now was, as East shifted so he was bent over the flat surface, hands braced on the tufted velvet.

“There,” I said as I met their blistering stares. “Now no one’s back is turned.”

East dragged his teeth over his lower lip as he eyed my wide straddle. “And you’re really going to just sit up there while Zac fucks me?”

“No. I’m going to sit up here and get myself *off* while Zac fucks you.”

“Oh God.” Zac’s voice was strained as he gripped the base of his dick for some semblance of control—but I didn’t want control. I wanted him to lose his mind.

“Zac?”

“Yes?”

“Take him the way you’d want me to take you.”

East’s fingers dug into the velvet of the bench. “Shit.”

As if my words had given him some sort of permission, Zac smoothed a hand over the round curve of East’s hip and tore open one of the packets of lube. The tense concentration on his face spoke volumes on how aroused he was as he looked down at the bare ass on full display for him. And I’d been

right—East had one hell of a spectacular ass, high, tight and round. The flickering torches illuminated his skin in a way that made it glow.

Zac dragged his thumb down the center of East's cheeks then took a handful of one and spread him apart. He poured the lube over East's hole and began to tease him with his fingers, and when the first one slid inside, East's curse echoed around the room.

Zac dragged his finger out and pushed two more back inside, and my hand picked up his rhythm and followed his lead as he began to stretch East wide. East's head hung low as he shoved back onto Zac's fingers, a greedy bottom if ever there was one. But that fervor and hunger he had for Zac's cock was so damn hot, I was almost jealous it wasn't going to be mine.

"Eyes up, James," I said. "I thought you wanted to look at my big cock."

East's tongue came out to flirt with his upper lip. "I want to suck it too. Want to bring it down— *Ahhh*."

Zac chose that exact moment to replace his fingers with the plump head of his dick, and I had to admit, I liked his fucking style.

Literally.

It was becoming obvious how this unlikely pair had wound up together. An argument at some point that had no doubt led to Zac shutting East up the only way possible—sex. And as I watched my usually levelheaded TA sink every inch of his cock into East's pretentious ass, it was all I could do not to come right then and there.

It was sexy as fuck and forbidden on so many levels. But it was too late to go back tonight. The lines had been blurred. Roles had been forgotten down here. And it was too late to stop what was so close to being finished. Not when Zac's hips were pumping faster and East's cries were getting more desperate as he white-knuckled the bench and started to shove back on Zac like his life depended on it.

I got to my feet, the draw of them too strong to resist, and as I stepped down from the dais, Zac's eyes tracked me. But his hips didn't slow as I let my gaze roam down his young, fit body, to where he was driving into East's.

They were as beautiful as they were sexy, all firm skin and muscles glistening in the light of the flames, and I knew that if I touched them I would most certainly get burned.

So instead, I stepped in front of them and issued an order I knew would cause an explosion.

“Stop.”

“What?” East gasped, as Zac’s body tensed behind him and his eyes narrowed, the lust swirling in their depths morphing into full-blown rebellion.

“*Stop*?” Zac asked, making sure he hadn’t misheard me.

“Yes.” My eyes lowered to where his cock was lodged deep inside of East, who moaned at the interruption. “*Stop* and kneel down beside James. Now.”

I could see the confusion creeping into every line of Zac’s face as he pulled himself free of East’s body and slowly took his place down beside him.

“Very nice, you two,” I told them as East pushed up to sit on his heels beside Zac, a fulminating look on his face. “That was very fucking nice.”

I wrapped my hand around my hard-on and gave it a good, long stroke.

“But down here, I come first.”

As my words penetrated their lust-addled brains, the frustration and annoyance vanished and was replaced with shock and, dare I say, some awe.

“Yessss,” East growled as his eyes fell to my pumping fist. “Do it—come all the fuck over us.”

The bossy little shit was still ordering everyone around as he grabbed hold of his own dick and started stroking. Zac followed suit, spitting in his palm and shoving his cock through his hand as I stood on the opposite side of the bench and masturbated to the sight of them.

“Don’t come,” I warned them, my eyes never leaving their naked bodies as they watched me fuck my fist as hard and fast as I would if I was inside of them right now.

As that illicit thought slammed into me, my climax shot down my spine and took hold of every ounce of control I possessed, and seconds later, I was granting East his wish. I came all over the two kneeling before me, marking them in a way I had no right to. But marking them in the way I *needed* to right now.

Zac’s lips parted on a shocked gasp as my cum sprayed his cheek and down his neck, then he stole a taste as East ran his fingers through the sticky mess dripping down his chest.

Their reaction had me milking my dick for every last drop, wanting to give it all to them. Then I let go of myself, took each of their chins in hand, and said, “Now you can come, any way you like.”

They turned toward each other, and East was the first to move. He leaned over and licked a path up Zac’s cheek, tasting me in one of the most primal ways possible, before Zac grabbed the back of his neck and crushed their mouths together.

In a tangle of hands, lips, and cocks they rubbed up against each other in a frenzied friction, each driving the other closer and closer to the edge until Zac ripped his mouth free of East’s and twin curses ricocheted around this secret room that had just become a secret for a whole *new* slew of reasons.

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FOURTEEN

zac

MY STOMACH WAS a ball of nerves and hot anticipation as I walked into Astor on Monday morning. With every step, the thought of seeing King again sent mixed messages through my body, and of course it was my dick that was the most thrilled. How could it not be after what we'd done?

I forced in a strangled breath, tightening my fist around the strap of my bag as I made my way through the students milling around before classes. I knew I needed to flip the switch before I got to our shared office, to pretend like nothing had happened now that we were at school. Neither East nor I were supposed to acknowledge anything about Friday night, which meant King would be doing the same.

How the hell was I going to look at him and forget, though? The whole secret society thing was huge on its own and would've taken all my attention the last few days, but I couldn't even process that right now. Not when King, *my* Professor Kingston, the man I'd always been infatuated by and thought of as this impenetrable force, had shown his mutual attraction by coming all over us. We'd gotten him *that* turned on.

I couldn't stop thinking about it. I was a man obsessed. All I could feel was the way he'd watched East and I fuck. How it'd only ramped up how good the sex had been in a way I didn't think was possible. And then…

King unzipping his pants. Pulling out his cock. His hot cum raining down on our skin—

"You are so fucked."

East's voice jerked me out of the memory I'd been reliving over and over again, and I blinked. "What?"

He reached for my arm and pulled me aside. “You need to fix your face and act like King didn’t come all over it. You think I’m not doing the same thing over here? The only difference is, I’m not showing it. So fix. Your. Face.”

God. He made it sound so easy. Like sitting across from King and trying to concentrate on grading papers rather than his delicious dick was going to be a walk in the park.

News fucking flash, it was going to be hard as hell—in the literal sense.

“You think that’s the *only* difference? What about the fact that you don’t have to sit in a confined space with him and act like he hasn’t seen you—”

“Fuck another one of his students like you’re a goddamn porn star? And trust me, I should know—my friend’s dating one.”

I let out a sigh and rubbed the bridge of my nose.

“I think that’s a plus, personally,” East continued. “I mean, clearly you impressed the guy. He came all over us.”

“*East*,” I hissed, dropping my hand so I could glare him in the eye. “Would you try to be serious for a second?”

“Why? You’re busy enough being serious for the both of us.” He leaned his shoulder against the wall and cocked his head. “All I’m saying is, lighten up a bit. Try to remember that everything we did, we *all* wanted. He’s not going to act weird, so why should we? In fact, he’s probably going to act like it didn’t happen at all.”

Which was the part that was bothering me the most. How could I just forget one of the hottest nights of my life?

“Zac?”

“Yeah, you’re right. I just need to forget it.”

“That’s right. It’s a secret, remember? *Secret* society.”

“I don’t actually think that applies to *that* portion of the evening.”

“Well, just pretend it did. We signed an NDA and now we have to forget about it. Unless of course he decides to bend you over his desk today. Then you better come and get me.”

I shoved him back out into the hall and continued toward the office, and to my surprise, East tagged along beside me. We usually kept our distance in the illustrious halls of Astor, but it seemed he was after a little company this morning too. Or perhaps someone who had shared the same experience he had this past Friday.

I eyed his profile as he casually strode down the hall and wondered what it would feel like to possess one ounce of the ease with which he navigated the world.

“Your friends ask you where you disappeared to Friday?”

He smirked. “They know better. If I’m not with them, they just figure a better invitation came along.”

“Nice, East. That’s real nice.”

He shrugged. “They’d do the same to me. We’re friends, not each other’s keepers. Is it my fault none of them were seen as potential recruits in this secret organization? No. I always said I was the leader. This just proves I was right.”

“So you’re going to do it, then?”

“Hell yes. Why? You having second thoughts?”

“No, not second thoughts, but I am curious. There’s a lot of unknowns to unpack, like who were the other men down there? What do they do? What happens at the end of our trial period? What do they expect from us?”

“Good God. I was joking when I said you were being serious enough for the both of us, but you really do have your dick in a twist, don’t you?”

“These are questions we should be asking.”

“No shit. But King made it pretty obvious he wasn’t going to tell us anything until he was ready. Why stress about it now?”

“I’m just trying to wrap my head around everything, that’s all. I don’t like unanswered questions.”

“Neither do I, usually. But you have to admit, this is pretty fucking cool. *We* were recruited as potential movers and shakers by King.”

“I know. But I think that’s what’s throwing me off the most.” I pushed open the door to the office and walked inside, leaving East to follow. “The fact that King is part of this.”

“*Part* of it? Seemed like he was the leader to me.”

“Exactly. Like he’s not just Professor Kingston anymore, the man I’ve spent the last few years looking up to as my mentor, but also the leader of this underground organization.”

East leaned back against the door. “So what? It’s not like he could sit you down and tell you. Or have you pencil in a meeting on his schedule for his band of hooded friends. The fact he picked you to be a part of it should tell you how highly he thinks of you.”

He pushed off the door and walked over to me, reaching for the strap of my bag and drawing it down my shoulder.

“Want me to take your mind off it?”

“No. The last thing I need is for him to walk in here and catch me with a fucking hard-on.”

“Why? Last time he did, he asked you to fuck me. I’ve got a free period this morning—I’m sure I could fit you in.”

I snatched my bag off East and stepped away from him. “You are not helping the situation.”

“That’s because you’re not letting me.”

“Seriously, East, you need to go. I can’t have you here when he arrives.”

“Can’t?” East asked. “Or don’t want me here?”

“Both.”

“Fine. I’ll leave you and your King all alone,” he said as he strolled back to the door and reached for the handle. “But remember, if he bends you over that desk, call me!”

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FIFTEEN

king

THE FIRST FACE I saw when I walked into Astor on Monday had me wishing I could turn on my heel and walk right back out.

“Professor Kingston, good, you’re here.” There were still breakfast pastry crumbs at the corner of Professor Rathborne’s mouth and dusting the front of his khaki members-only jacket, and I had to force my eyes up to his as he blocked my path.

I plastered on a smile. “Dennis. What can I do for you?”

“I thought you should know I have some intel.” He looked over his shoulder and then lowered his voice. “The kids, you know. They tell me things.”

Here we go. “Do they now?”

“I guess they feel they can confide in me, since I’m one of the favorites here.”

“Sure, sure.” I shifted my briefcase to my other hand and brushed by him, leaving him to trail after me.

“There’s rumors of a senior prank happening soon.”

“I imagine so. It’s the end of the year.”

“They said it was those prince troublemakers cooking something up.”

James Easton’s face flashed through my mind then, but it was an entirely inappropriate visual for where I was currently standing. As his former professor, I shouldn’t be thinking about him bent over naked while Zac plowed into him from behind—

“Did you hear what I said?” Rathborne rudely interrupted.

“I did.”

“So what should we do about it?”

“About a harmless senior prank?” I said as we rounded the corner toward my office. “Nothing.”

“Nothing? Don’t you remember what those troublemakers did to the dean’s room? Or tying up those poor boys—”

I whirled around and held my hand up. “Pure speculation on that last charge. Although from what I’ve witnessed, those ‘poor boys’ were entirely deserving of what they got.”

“But—”

“I’m not here to discuss any more hearsay with you, Dennis, so unless you have something specific and more troubling than a senior prank, I suggest we both get on with our day.”

Rathborne’s cheeks flushed as he opened and shut his mouth like a fish, and when he couldn’t seem to form a response, I turned and made my way to my office.

The staff here gossiped more than the students, and it was East’s name, as well as those of his fellow princes, that came up the most often. Whoever would they talk about once they all graduated?

Again, East laid out beneath another naked, hard body assaulted my brain, and my hand hesitated on the door handle as the other man in the memory came into focus. The one who was probably already in my office.

Zac Fletcher.

The last thing I’d expected had been for Zac and East to confess their fantasy for me.

Strike that. The last thing I’d expected had been to give in to them in any way. It was a reckless action in the heat of a moment that never should’ve happened.

A moment that made me hard just thinking about it.

But that was then. It wasn’t anything that would bleed over into what happened between these walls. My life was full of carefully compartmentalized boxes, and I was a master of keeping them right where I wanted them.

I opened the door, and just like I’d expected, Zac was already inside, standing at the printer and pulling sheets off as they came through. He looked up as I shut the door behind me and nodded in acknowledgment.

“Morning, professor.”

“Good morning, Zac.”

He turned back to what he was doing like nothing had changed between Friday and now.

Very good.

"Is that this week's schedule you're getting together?" It was, I already knew that, but the last thing either of us needed this morning was an awkward silence.

"Yes." Zac glanced at me as I made my way to my desk. "There was a last-minute change needed, but it's all in there now."

"Thank you," I said as he handed over the papers. "I'll go over it in a second."

"Sounds like a plan."

The words coming out of Zac's mouth were nothing but professional. But there was an underlying clip to them, a tense undertone that he was doing his best to hide in the face of this new situation we found ourselves in.

I settled in at my desk and opened my laptop, and as it powered up I ran through the detailed schedule in my hand. It was perfect, of course—Zac rarely turned in anything that was less than, which was why he made such a terrific TA. He was conscientious, studious, smart as a whip, and I wouldn't let him spend the last couple of months feeling uncomfortable around me.

"This all looks great," I told him, holding the papers up. When all I got was a cursory glance in my direction, I decided on a different approach. "Did you do anything fun this weekend?"

Zac's shoulders stiffened slightly as he brought his head up. "No. I had pretty big night out Friday, so I decided to stay home and recoup."

"I see." And I did, in vivid images flashing through my mind. I'd never thought of Zac as anything other than another one of my students—a highly capable and intelligent young man who would go far in whatever he chose to do.

But when he'd confessed to wanting me, when East had spilled Zac's deepest, darkest fantasy out for me to see, it'd been like the filter I'd been looking at him through was removed. It was as though I was seeing him for the first time.

Or another side of him.

"What about you?" Zac shifted in his seat. "Did you do anything exciting?"

The move was slight but the undercurrent pulsing between us told me his mind was on the same thing as mine.

“No. Like you, I had a big night Friday and took the weekend to grade some papers.”

“Oh?” A frown pulled between Zac’s brows. “I could’ve helped you with that.”

“At my house?”

“I… No, of course not, sir. I just meant I could have collected them and taken them to my house to work on.”

Zac being anywhere near my house after I’d come all over him and East was a monumentally bad idea. But try telling that to the dick now throbbing between my legs.

“You could have,” I said, and thanked God for the desk shielding me from his direct stare. “But I managed on my own. I can do a lot of things on my own.”

Twin spots of color hit Zac’s cheeks as my double meaning hit, and when a knock sounded on the door, both of us startled.

“Come in,” I called.

A freshman from my upcoming lecture this morning—Holly—stuck her head inside the office, looking back and forth between Zac and myself.

“Oh I’m sorry. I can, um, come back.”

“No, it’s fine. Come in, Holly.” I gestured her inside and watched the nervous way she fidgeted with her hands as she looked anywhere but at me, and I already knew where this was going. “What did you need?”

“I… Well, the assignment for class this morning?”

“Yes?”

“I didn’t get to it and I was wondering if I could maybe get an extension?”

“Is there a reason why?”

When her eyes dropped to the floor and she gnawed on her lower lip, I had my answer—no. Clearly we weren’t the only two who’d had a busy weekend. Unfortunately for her, I wasn’t known for my leniency. But that was only because I wanted the best for my students. I wanted them to succeed. I wanted them to get the most out of their education here at Astor. They were paying enough for it.

“Without a reason, there’s no extension. You know the rules, Holly.”

“But—”

“Yes?”

Her chin started to quiver, and I sent up a quick prayer that tears wouldn’t follow.

“If I fail this paper I won’t get to go to Venice for spring break.”

Zac’s cough in the corner was barely muffled by his hand as she stood there, waiting for me to feel some sort of sympathy for her situation.

I didn’t.

“That’s unfortunate. I hear it’s nice this time of year.” I pulled up my email and began to respond to the most pressing ones, giving her a clear signal that this discussion was over.

She hesitated like she wanted to say something else, but then nodded and left the room.

Zac wasn’t looking my way, but I could still see his lips pressed together out of the corner of my eye as he tried not to chuckle.

“Something you’d like to add?” I asked. “You think I was too harsh?”

“Actually, I think you did her a favor, sir. Venice in late March is a little chilly.”

A grin threatened to crack through my controlled exterior, but unlike Zac, I’d had many more years of schooling my expressions.

I did appreciate a smartass, though.

“Speaking from experience?” I asked.

“My parents dragged me to every restaurant in Italy when I was growing up, so yes. What about you? Ever been?”

“No. I’m not really a European vacation kind of guy. Give me the Caribbean, a private beach I can lie out on in the sun with a cocktail in hand, and I’m in heaven.”

Zac’s eyes ran down over me as if he were imagining that exact scenario. “Sounds nice.”

I knew I shouldn’t continue with this conversation, but the dark flash of arousal that flickered in his eyes was very similar to the one I’d seen when he looked at me the first time he slid inside of East.

“The private beach? Or my lying on it?”

Zac sucked in a quick breath, but before he could answer, I gestured to his laptop.

“Better get to work on today’s first lecture, yes? You don’t want to end up like poor Holly and get in trouble.”

Zac swallowed and returned his attention to his laptop. But it wasn't lost on me the way he reached down to readjust himself beneath the table.

Had I crossed the line I'd promised myself I wouldn't this morning? Yes. But then again, I'd already crossed every line on Friday, so what was one more?

As Zac worked away quietly, I allowed myself a moment to appreciate the fact that I was right—he'd turned out to be exactly as expected, yet completely unexpected at the same time. He knew how to keep himself together even after learning information that must've shocked him, and he had a hidden fire in him that, once unleashed, was *very* appealing.

Something I was glad to have learned with only months left in his scholastic career as opposed to years. I wasn't sure I could've resisted temptation otherwise.

But for the time being, I had to. Here, I was his professor, and though he must've been brimming with a multitude of questions, he continued to keep his mouth shut, typing away like any other day.

It was exactly what I would expect from my diligent TA. James Easton, on the other hand? That remained to be seen.

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SIXTEEN

east

I'D HAD EVERY intention of going to class, but I couldn't stop thinking about what was happening behind closed doors with King and Zac. Were they talking about our hot, forbidden night? Making plans for a round two? Was King checking out the way Zac filled out his tailored pants? Was Zac unable to sit still every time King uttered a deep, authoritative word that only reminded him of the professor's sexy, dominant side?

This wouldn't do. Being left out of even a moment of sexual tension was killing me, and that was why I found my feet moving in the direction of King's first class.

I peered into each lecture hall I passed, looking for a glimpse of Mr. Tall, Dark, and Sexy, and finally I spotted him at a lectern in one of the larger halls. I slipped inside behind a straggler and took a seat in the back row like I belonged there.

Would King kick me out once he saw me? Most likely. But not before I got a chance to ogle him and make sure he noticed me.

All around, students pulled out their laptops and set up quicker than I'd seen in any other class. For good reason, too. King used to sniff out those who weren't paying attention and lock them out of the room.

Shit, now I was thinking about locked rooms…and certain someones in locked rooms…

King's voice boomed off the walls, so commanding there was no need for a microphone in the vast hall. It certainly made *me* sit up a little straighter, mostly to get a better view of him.

Most of the time when I'd seen him, he wore a suit, but occasionally he'd switch it up, like today. A pair of dark jeans made his legs look a mile long, and he wore a russet cable-knit cashmere sweater that hugged his muscled physique in a way that should've had every person in this room drooling. Jesus, had his arms always been that big? I'd noticed King was attractive before, and now that I'd gotten a glimpse, I was dying to see what he looked like without any of that shit on.

The sound of everyone starting to type around me was a low hum in the background as King's gaze swept across the room, and when it passed over me, he did a subtle double take.

My mouth curled up on one side as we locked eyes, and even though he didn't miss a beat of his lecture, those dark depths sparked.

With interest? Maybe remembering something he shouldn't be?

I tugged at my pants beneath the desk, and my heart began pumping just a little faster. Any second now he was going to ask me to leave. He'd call me by my first name, tell me I was loitering in the wrong class, and send me on my way.

Any time now…

King held my gaze, arched his brow ever so slightly, and then continued perusing the rest of his captive audience.

Interesting…

I licked my lips and found myself inching down in my seat, suddenly warm all over in the aftermath of King's attention. Time passed by in a haze after that—a *sex* haze. King continued to be his usual professional self, of course, but all I could think about was the way he'd stood from that mighty, throne-like chair when Zac drove into me. And the sure way he'd walked down from that dais and revealed a cock I was still dying to suck—

"Dude, you gonna move? I'd like to leave sometime this year."

I turned to the plebeian beside me who'd dared question me, and as I got to my feet, he backed up a step. "What did you just say to me?"

Whether it was my tone or the recognition of *who* exactly he'd just being a douchebag to, the guy held up a hand.

"Sorry, East, um, I didn't realize that was you. I didn't know you were in this class."

There, that was better. The respect my name deserved.

"I'm not."

"Then why are you—"

“Mr. Easton.” King’s stern voice interrupted a question he’d definitely not want me to answer. I turned to see him making his way up the stairs, and all my irritation vanished.

Fuck he was hot. In clothes. Out of clothes. Pants unzipped. Cock in hand.

“Mr. Easton?”

Shit. Did he ask me something? “Could you please repeat that?”

“Move aside. Kenny needs to get to his next class.”

Oh right, Kenny. I’d forgotten he was there. I let out a sigh and moved out of the row so Kenny could pass by, and once he exited the lecture hall, King brought his eyes back to me.

“What are you doing here, James?”

I shrugged. “Furthering my education.”

“Really?”

“Of course. Why *else* would I be here?”

“I have no idea. But if I recall, it was all you could do to *make* it to my class when it was assigned to you.”

“That’s true,” I said, running my eyes down over King’s long legs. “But that was before I knew how much you could teach me.”

He said nothing, instead choosing to turn and make his way back to the front of the lecture hall. But I wasn’t done with him yet. I wanted to know how this morning went with Zac. The poor guy had been a bundle of sexual nerves when I left him in the office he shared with Mr. Hardass, and I wanted to make sure he was still breathing.

After all, who was going to fuck me if Zac was dead from all the blood in his head pooling in his cock over his hottie professor?

As though he had eyes in the back of his head, King said, “You need to go to class, James.”

“I don’t, actually. Free period.”

“Two in a row?”

“Well, no, this period was with Livingston, but you’re so much more *educational* to watch.”

King straightened with his laptop in hand, his eyes flashing with annoyance—and maybe a hint of arousal? It was hard to differentiate with him.

“Cut the crap. You need to go to class, now.”

“How about this? I’ll go to class when you tell me how your morning went with Zac.”

“Zac?”

“Yes, you know the tall, lean guy with the sex hair and the glasses that make him look a little nerdy? The same guy who fu—”

“Get to your point, James.”

“I was just wondering how he was doing? He was a little out of sorts this morning. Hotter than usual. Running a bit of a fever.”

King’s lips twitched at the side, and that told me all I needed to know. He’d noticed Zac’s behavior for himself. Of course he had—nothing got past King, and Zac’s emotions had been written all over his face.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He made a move toward the side door to leave, but I wasn’t letting him go now that I had him.

Who knew when I’d get another opportunity to ask him all the things on my mind? And if he wasn’t going to spill the beans on Zac, maybe I could get him talking about something else.

“No? I suppose you also have no memory of the secret underground—” Before I could even finish my thought, King strode back across the room, put his laptop on the lectern, and kept coming straight for me.

Shit. Oh shitballs.

In the blink of an eye, the look on his face had gone from amused annoyance to downright hostile. I backed up one, two, and then three steps, and my back met the wall. He moved a jean-clad leg on either side of me as he took a firm grip of my chin. Then he angled my face up toward his, and it felt as though the breath was knocked right out of me.

King had one of the most arresting faces I’d ever seen, and up close like this, all hostile like he wanted to throttle me, it was even more intense. My dick immediately stiffened, and my body’s reaction wasn’t lost on the man pinning me in place as a low curse left his mouth. I rocked up against him, and when King thrust forward to keep me in place, the steely length of his erection had me sucking in a breath. His eyes flashed fire, a warning to tread lightly or get burned. “You need to keep your mouth shut and remember who you’re talking to, little prince. I’m not just your professor.”

He let me go then, like I was the one burning him. Then he picked up his laptop and headed for the door, and all I could think was if King was trying to deter me, it wasn’t working. At all. He’d only made me more determined to get another night with the three of us.

And I wasn’t going to be denied.

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SEVENTEEN

king

I DRAINED THE rest of my Old Fashioned and tried to relax as I waited for my dinner partner to arrive, but tension coiled through every part of my body. It'd been building the last couple of days, and I couldn't place the full blame on my packed schedule. Not when I'd made decisions recently that complicated both the personal and professional aspects of my life.

I rolled my shoulders and cracked my neck from side to side, and that, along with the alcohol, helped a little. It just didn't do anything to stop the thoughts assaulting me at every turn. Didn't relieve the confusion rattling around inside as I thought about things I shouldn't. Namely, two *people* I shouldn't. There was no reason why any thought of what happened days ago should still be lingering. That wasn't how I worked, not to mention, it was wrong.

Students. They're still students *at Astor.*

It didn't matter how many times I put that on repeat; my brain wasn't getting the message, and hell if I knew why.

"Sorry I'm late." Archer Carrington pulled out the chair across from me, unbuttoned his suit jacket, and took a seat. As he sipped his water, he took one look at my empty glass and then my face, then got the waitress's attention. "He'll have another one of those, and I'll take a Manhattan, thanks."

"Busy day?" I asked as she left.

"Oh no, my friend. We're not starting with me—we're starting with whatever's going on here." He gestured toward my face. I couldn't imagine

what he saw there, considering I never let anything slip, so perhaps he'd gotten wind of the new recruits.

"Are you trying to tell me I have something on my face?" I said, setting my glass aside.

"I am. And it looks a lot like you have some crazy things on your mind."

"Maybe you're projecting. You're the one with the new business and live-in boyfriend—"

"And somehow even less responsibility now that I've let all the unnecessary shit go." He settled back in his chair, a smile on his lips. "Trust me when I say I've never been happier."

"I can see that. It looks good on you."

Archer's grin grew as our waitress returned and handed us both our drinks. "If you would've told me life could be like this a year ago, I wouldn't have believed you." He slid the cherry garnish off the swizzle stick with his teeth and gestured to me. "All right, your turn, and don't make me beg."

The thought of Archer begging anyone was as ridiculous as *me* begging, and it had me taking a long swallow of my Old Fashioned and looking around to make sure this conversation would stay as private as our corner table in the back. "Are you aware of the recruitment that began on Friday?"

Archer's brows rose. "Already? It's only March."

"Let's just say my hand was forced."

"Forced? How? And by whom?"

"James Easton." I lifted my glass and watched over the rim as Archer's jaw fell into his lap.

"I know I'm getting older, but I didn't think my hearing was going yet. Did you just say James *Easton*? As in East? The same pompous ass that runs with Preston's crowd?"

"I did, yes."

"For God's sake, man, why?"

"Because that nosy, pompous *ass* tracked us down, that's why." I shrugged, trying to tell myself there was no point in stressing over this latest development, but judging by the look on Archer's face, the knot in my stomach these past few days was justified—and he only knew half of it. "He was already on the list to be recruited—"

"In a couple of years, when he matured."

“We’d agreed on graduation.”

“No, a handful of you did. *I* always cautioned on the side of waiting.” He brought his drink to his mouth and drained it. It seemed talk of East made everyone need to throw back several glasses of the hard stuff.

“Need another?”

Archer flagged down a passing waiter. “How about we just get a bottle of something? I have a feeling we’re going to need it.”

“Whiskey work?”

“You know it.”

We put in a quick order of food as well but told them to hurry on the liquor.

“So, you’re going to have to lay this out for me.” Archer leaned back in his seat and steepled his hands over his stomach. “Why would East be tracking us down? What had him sniffing around?”

I knew the question would come. Archer was no one’s fool, and it was the logical one to ask in the face of such an impulsive decision on my behalf. But the answer would open up another whole line of questions I wasn’t quite ready to get into yet.

So I deflected.

“It wasn’t just East, though.”

“What do you mean? Someone else was with him? Someone from the list?”

“Yes, my TA, Zac. He was there too.”

“*With* East?”

“Yes.”

I could see the wheels spinning behind Archer’s eyes. “You’re not being very forthcoming right now.”

“When am I ever forthcoming?”

“True, but I can’t help you if you don’t talk to me. Why was Zac with East?”

“They…hook up on occasion.”

Archer’s eyes widened, and his disbelief would’ve been comical if I didn’t know where this was leading.

“Zac Fletcher? Your star pupil and the menace to Manhattan are…together?”

“*Together* would be too serious a term for the arrangement I believe they have.”

“Okay, so fuck buddies?”

My mind instantly conjured up Zac’s hips slapping against East’s bare ass cheeks, and I nodded. “Yes, that’s much more accurate.”

Archer blew out a breath and shook his head. “I mean, good luck to Zac with that one. Personally I’d be too scared to fall asleep in the same bed as East, but to each their own.”

The waitress stopped by our table with our entrees, and then Archer leaned over toward me, a knife pointed in my direction.

“That still doesn’t explain why they were there in the first place. Why you moved up their recruitment.”

No it didn’t. And I’d run out of ways to avoid Archer’s question.

“They were there to see me. Or should I say, they were there trying to find me.”

Archer cocked his head, clearly trying to decipher the real meaning behind my words, and then a smile slowly spread across his lips. “And why would they want to *find* you out of school hours, Professor Kingston?”

Oh, he knew *exactly* why. He was living with a prime example of the why. Not too long ago, I’d been the one giving him advice on what to do after getting involved with an Astor student.

“It seems that they concocted a plan to track me down and invite me to one of their hookups.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes.” I cut into the perfectly cooked filet on my plate. “They thought they were arriving at a sex club and were, of course, denied.”

Archer chuckled and took a bite of his dinner. “I almost wish I could’ve been there to see that rejection in person.”

“It’s recorded if you really want the pleasure. But as you know, we can’t have outsiders sniffing around and getting curious, especially ones like East. He’s aggressive, resourceful, and goes after what he wants. It’d only be a matter of time before he uncovered something he shouldn’t.”

“I understand that, really I do, and Zac? He’s ready. You work with him on a daily basis, so you’ve seen the growth there. East, on the other hand? I was kind of hoping you’d all change your mind about him.”

I’d often wondered myself whether East was a smart choice. But everything I’d just said was true. He was a wild card, but then again, that was how a lot of us had started out—some with even worse track records.

“East requires a close eye, I’ll give you that, which is why I think this is the smartest option. I figured, let’s get him under our control before he gets *out* of control.”

“Damn.” Archer reached for his drink. “James Easton. Well, you never do anything without thinking ten steps ahead.”

“Except the moment I came all over the two of them like that was part of the recruitment process.”

Archer coughed on the sip he’d just taken, sputtering, “What?”

I hadn’t meant to spring it on him like that, but there really wasn’t an easy segue into telling your longtime friend that you’d had sexual relations with the most irritating person in his boyfriend’s group of friends.

“I told you, they came looking for me to—”

“Hook up, yes, I remember that. I just assumed you told them to get lost.”

It was a logical assumption, and exactly what I *should’ve* done. “They came to me all but begging for it. If I recall, even you had difficulties in the face of such temptation.”

Archer put his utensils down and picked up his napkin, brushing it over his mouth. “Low blow.”

“An accurate one, though. I had no idea when I recruited them what they were up to or why they’d tracked me down. But once I had a moment alone to talk to them…”

Archer raised a brow, and I reached for the bottle sitting on the table between us.

“…things took on a life of their own. One minute I was asking them what they’d been doing looking for me, the next they were confessing to wanting a threesome.”

“That ballsy little fucker. It *was* East who spilled their secret, I’m assuming?”

“Yes, but it was Zac who wanted me to…” I waved my hand in the air.

“Wanted you to what?”

I leveled him with a *you know exactly what* look.

“Well, well, well.” Archer laughed. “Look how the tables have turned.”

“They haven’t turned.” I poured myself another glass and gestured to Archer’s, but he quickly covered it.

“Oh no, I want to be sober enough to remember this tomorrow.”

“I didn’t fuck them, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“*I* have no idea what to think. You’re just full of surprises tonight.”

I picked up my knife and fork and cut another piece of meat. “I told them I’d watch them instead.”

Silence descended over the table, and then Archer leaned forward and said under his breath, “At the club?”

“Yes. In the throne room, bent over one of the benches, and now that’s all I can think about.”

Another deep, rumbling chuckle left Archer. “My man, what have you gotten yourself into?”

“You enjoying this?”

“Truthfully? Yes.” He sat back and shook his head. “Zac is gorgeous.”

My eyes narrowed.

“What? You think I don’t have eyes?”

“I think you already have one college-age boyfriend and should keep your eyes on him.”

“So only *you’re* allowed to have two?”

“Are you trying to piss me off?”

“Nope.” Archer finished off his drink. “But you just answered one of the questions I was wondering about.”

“Which is?”

“Are you going to entertain this little threesome fantasy of theirs? I can see the interest in Zac, but East is such a shit. If you take him on, you’d have to employ one hell of a stiff hand to that arrogant ass. Actually, you might be the right fit for that task.”

I finished up my meal and reached for my napkin. “I don’t think that’s such a good idea. If anyone found out—”

“They’d what? Fire you? You’re planning to leave after graduation anyway, and they both only have a couple more months…”

“Are you *encouraging* me to do this?”

“As you pointed out, I live with my college-aged boyfriend, so it’s not like I can really take the high ground now.”

I let out a sigh and pinched the bridge of my nose, the ramifications of my actions still weighing heavily on my shoulders. I’d known it was a bad idea to engage with Zac and East, yet the second I saw the two of them naked in front of me, I’d been helpless to stop the release they incited.

Was I really entertaining the idea of more?

I already knew the answer to that. I'd known before I sat down to dinner with Archer. I couldn't stop thinking about Friday night or erase the visuals that would creep up on me at any given minute of the day.

It was so unlike me. But then again, so was what I was contemplating doing next.

"You're going to do it, aren't you?"

Archer was smart enough to know I wasn't going to answer. I was a private person by nature, whether it came to my job, my business, or my sex life, and that wasn't about to change now.

"I guess I don't have to say 'be careful,' because if anyone can handle East, it's you. But that boy is cunning and smart, so don't underestimate him."

"I'm aware." Which was another reason what I was thinking was a monumentally bad idea. "Just as I'm aware of who his father is and what's going on there."

"Bad business deals get made all the time, though. I'm sure it's nothing."

"I'm not."

"So do you still think East is a good asset, then?"

"East isn't his father. Whatever is happening there has nothing to do with James. But we'll have to keep a close eye on it."

"Agreed. But you'll have to have someone else keep tabs over spring break. Preston and I are heading out of town for the week."

"Oh? Where are you escaping to this time?"

"Saint-Tropez. I have a nice little villa I want to introduce him to. What about you, any plans?"

"Not yet."

"Then maybe you should plan something." Archer gave a knowing grin. "You and I are very driven people, Ty. Relax a little. If there's one thing Preston helped me do, it was stop for a second and look around at what I was missing. Clearly, you're doing the same. Maybe there's a reason for that?"

Or maybe I'd just lost my mind contemplating all of this. Either way, I was thinking about it, and I knew myself well enough to know that I was more than interested. It was just a matter of whether the risk was worth it.

But I hadn't gotten to where I was by playing it safe.

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EIGHTEEN

east

THE ENTIRE CREW had gathered in Daire and Gavin's condo Wednesday night, and it wasn't until I saw the way every available surface was taken up by one of them or their significant others that I realized how big our group had gotten.

West commandeered one of the loveseats with JT pulled onto his lap the way he liked it. Donovan sat on the corner of the kitchen island with Kelly standing between his thighs, the both of them picking through the spread of snacks laid out and chatting with Preston, who was Archer-less for the night. Daire grumbled in his armchair that the massive bruise on his shin from MMA practice didn't need attention, while Gavin swatted his hands away and told him he was "putting ice on it whether you like it or not, so stop bitching."

And then there was Travis and Caleb, taking up opposite ends of the couch, Travis's feet in Caleb's lap, tossing grapes at each other to catch with their mouths like morons. Utter freakin' morons.

I'd never felt like such an outsider in my entire life.

This is bullshit.

I let out a loud sigh. "Is there a reason I'm forced to be here for this suck-face party, or can I get on with more interesting plans?"

A grape hit the side of my face, and I turned and narrowed my eyes on the thrower. Caleb.

He smiled. "No one's forcing you to be here, so maybe you *should* leave. I'm sure there's a group of wannabes just dying for someone to boss them around."

“I’ve already met my quota on dealing with idiots for today, but I’ll make an exception for you. Why don’t you fetch me a martini?”

“Only if you promise to drown in it,” he retorted.

“And give you the satisfaction? Not likely.”

“Guys, guys,” Gavin said, moving to block our views of each other. “Knock it off. I’m the one who invited you, *all* of you, because I knew Van wouldn’t do it.”

Donovan’s head shot up. “Do what?”

Gavin grinned, his smile as bright as his platinum hair, and then turned on the TV. “Something not even you’ve seen yet, big brother. Everyone, direct your eyes to the screen.”

“Oh shit, are we getting another Van and Kelly porn flick?” Travis scooted to the edge of the couch, forgetting all about the flying grapes—and his boyfriend’s big mouth.

“That would be a *fuck no*,” Donovan said as he slid down from the counter. “You shouldn’t have gotten to see any in the first place.”

“It’s not my fault you and the monster cock over there couldn’t keep it in your pants.” Travis shrugged and scooted closer to Caleb. “Besides, Caleb wasn’t here for the viewing—”

Caleb slapped a hand over his mouth. “And I’m totally fine with that. I’d rather not see my friends getting it on.”

“*Now* they’re your friends?” I scoffed. “After you dismissed all of us for years like some do-gooder ass—”

“*Shut up!*” Gavin shouted, a sound I’d never actually heard come out of him before, and it was so surprising that everyone went dead silent. Except Daire. He chuckled to himself like he was proud of the effect he’d had on his boyfriend.

“And you all call *me* the bad influence,” I said.

Gavin pointed at me. “East, I swear if you don’t keep your trap closed, I’ll have Travis bust out his design kit and sew your mouth shut with a dull needle.”

“Kinky.” I took a seat on the arm of the couch, mimicked zipping my lips, and waited not so patiently for Gavin to pull up whatever this little presentation was. If it *was* another Van and Kelly sex special, I couldn’t say I’d be disappointed. Those two were a special breed of hot.

An image popped up on the screen that warned anyone off from sharing, and Gavin paused the video. “Check this out. See if you notice any familiar

faces.” He hit play, and the video transitioned into an image of the five joined Olympic rings.

“No way. Gav, how’d you get this?” Donovan said as he and Kelly both made their way into the living room. Clips of athletes from prior summer games flashed up on the screen, one after the other, each displaying different designs for their uniforms.

Gavin snorted. “Are you kidding? Dad has to approve everything for the network, remember, and that includes uniforms.”

“And he just gave it to you?”

“Well, no… I might’ve accidentally seen it when I used his computer the other day.”

“Damn, you really are turning delinquent, young Truitt,” I said, slow-clapping in approval. Stealing content from his head of cable TV father? Maybe it was *my* influence on him, not Daire’s.

“Holy shit,” Preston said, and I looked up to see Donovan and Kelly in the skimpiest red, white, and blue briefs I’d ever seen. Actually, Kelly was spilling out of his and had to turn away from the room full of people they were trying them on for.

“Which fucking sport is that one for?” Travis asked, wide-eyed.

“Diving,” Kelly said, his huge arms crossed over his chest as he watched the flurry of designers trying to find a way to *support* him.

“Let’s just say they weren’t considering the size of his dick when they chose us to model the uniforms,” Donovan said. “I think he, uh, took them by surprise.”

“What the hell did they think they were getting?” West nodded at Kelly. “He’s six-three and built like a brick shithouse.”

“These are for athletes, dumbass,” Daire finally spoke up. “You think they’re gonna pick a skinny cokehead to model this shit?”

West shrugged, acknowledging his point, but the second he took a sip of his drink, Donovan and Kelly were back on the screen and he choked on a swallow. “Fuckin’ hell,” he said, continuing to cough, his eyes wide on the track-and-field uniforms our friends sported.

Donovan fit his outfit perfectly, his long, leanly muscled body looking every bit like that of a track star, but Kelly… Those spandex onesies were losing the battle against his bulge.

“Good God, man.” Caleb cursed under his breath before adding, “Are you trying to make everyone else look bad?”

“You should’ve seen it without anything restraining him,” Travis said.

Someone trumpeted like an elephant, sending the room into howls of laughter that only got louder when they modeled the next ensemble—the men’s gymnastic onesie.

JT peeked through spread fingers like he couldn’t bear to watch. “How is it possible it’s just getting worse?”

“Beg to differ,” Travis said. “The outfits are heinous, sure, but that fit…” He kissed his fingertips and winked at Kelly. “Nicely done, man.

“And you look great too, Van,” added Caleb, the suck-up.

Donovan only grinned at Kelly as he squeezed his boyfriend’s ass. The moony-eyed look he was giving him forced my eyes back on the screen.

“Hate to say it, but I don’t think they’ll be airing you in prime time, Kelly. Actually…” I cocked my head to the side. “Maybe they’ll work you in from the back.”

“Hey, I looked damn good in the jackets,” he protested.

Gavin skipped through the rest of the video, stopping on each new uniform and skipping through the designer’s commentary. When it came to an end, he turned it off and said, “So? What do you think? Amazing they got chosen for that, right?”

“I don’t know.” Preston scratched his jaw as he moved in beside Donovan and Kelly. “No disrespect to the clothes, but I think I prefer you both naked.”

My jaw became practically unhinged as it fell to the floor at our not-so-straight-anymore friend’s words. Never in a million years did I ever think Preston had it in him, not until he proved us all wrong by dating a much older man we’d all drooled over one time or another. I was about to express my surprise until he elbowed Donovan, and they both laughed at what he said like it was a joke.

“Actually, we’re flying to L.A. early next week so Van can do reshoots with a different guy,” Kelly said to a chorus of boos.

I shot to my feet. “Hold on, *next* week?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Uh, have you all forgotten we’re coming up on spring break?”

Kelly frowned. “Well, yeah, that’s why we can go. So Van doesn’t have to miss any school days.”

“What about our trip?”

“What trip?”

Oh hell no. I fixed my gaze on Donovan. “Forget to tell your boyfriend about our yearly getaway?”

“No, but I don’t have control over when the freakin’ Olympic committee schedules their dates, East,” Donovan said. “But don’t worry, we’ll still do something huge for graduation.”

Even though I was annoyed, the thought of a massive blowout during the summer appeased me a little, and I nodded. “Fine. But since the rest of us are all here, we should finalize plans to leave this weekend. Now does anyone have a bright idea where to go, or should we just close our eyes and point to somewhere on a map?”

When the room went dead silent—suspiciously silent—I arched a brow.

“What, you need help finding a map? Just pull one up on the screen.” I gestured toward the TV, which was still paired to Gavin’s phone. “Gav, you do it.”

He blinked at me then looked over his shoulder at Daire and bit his lip. “Uh, actually, we’ll be in Florida all week. D’s got a big match on Wednesday, so we leave Friday. But all of you can come if you want—”

“To *Florida*? Where every other spring breaker goes to get shitfaced and stupid?” I wrinkled my nose. “How pedestrian. No thanks. Next.”

“We didn’t know you had a match coming up, or we wouldn’t have made plans,” West told Daire.

I whirled in his direction. “And just where do you think *you’re* going?”

West trailed his fingers up and down JT’s thigh and smiled down at him. “JT’s family asked if I’d join them in the Hamptons during the break, and we thought it’d be a good idea.”

I sputtered out a laugh, and he shot me a glare.

He was joking. Right? Because the West I knew would rather run naked through Times Square than spend spring break—especially his *senior* spring break—with the dean of Astor’s family on a beach a couple hours away.

“That’s hilarious,” I said. “Where are you really going?”

“I just told you.”

I narrowed my eyes, trying to suss him out. “Bullshit.”

“It’s true. Dean Hawthorne asked me herself.”

What the actual fuck.

“Oh my God.” Something that sounded a lot like a growl escaped my throat, and I scrubbed a hand over my face roughly. “You’re killin’ me. You do know you can go to the Hamptons anytime? Literally. Any. Time.”

“Sorry, man,” West said, not looking as apologetic as he should. “Compromise, you know.”

No other word had ever sounded worse in my entire life.

While I tried not to gag on it, Travis let out a low whistle. “Wow, look at West learning the meaning of the word ‘compromise.’ Is it freaking anyone else out?”

West flipped him off, but Travis only grinned before turning his attention my way. “And before you ask, Caleb and I are going to an undisclosed location that’s none of your damn business, so you’ll have to manage without us too.”

Unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable.

Slowly, I turned toward Preston, the last man standing. “And you? It’s not like Archer gets spring break, so you’re good to go, right?”

Preston at least had the sense to look sheepish, unlike the other fuckers. “Sorry, East, he’s taking me to Saint-Tropez for the week, since pilot season’s winding down. I would’ve told you, but he just surprised me with it.”

My temper flared as I looked at each one of my so-called friends. All those couples, all that lovey-dovey bullshit. I just assumed all the last-minute indecisiveness on their part came down to wanting me to make an executive decision, but they’d all gone and made plans on their own.

“Wow. I see how it is.”

“What’s the big deal?” West, of all people, asked. “You can just hop on the family jet and go anywhere you want. Hell, you’ll probably prefer it.”

Ordinarily, he’d be right. But right now, no, actually, I couldn’t just take the jet to a destination unknown. My father had decided to refurbish the damn thing and said it would be out of commission for weeks.

But the guys didn’t need to know that. It wasn’t like I didn’t have a million connections once I decided where I wanted to go, so if they wanted to have pathetic spring breaks, then that was their own damn fault. Fuck being annoyed over their little romantic getaways. Whatever I did would be a million times more entertaining, and it wouldn’t include being tied down to one person and one cock.

“Fine,” I said, brushing a piece of lint off my sweater. “Be lame-asses. What do I care?”

“Come on, don’t be like that,” West said, starting in my direction. “Why don’t you come with us?” Behind him, JT’s eyes bugged out of his head.

Ha. Now if I really wanted to drive Golden Boy crazy, I'd tag along and make his trip miserable. Not to mention Dean Hawthorne hated me. It was tempting to take him up on it, just to be petty and because I could.

But then out of nowhere, Zac's face popped into my mind through all the chaos and disappointment, and suddenly I had a better option.

I gave West a tight smile and patted him on the cheek. "I don't need your pity invite, Weston. You two have a lovely time. Enjoy getting crabs."

He started to protest behind me, but I was over hearing all the excuses he or any of the guys had.

A few strong martinis somewhere with loud music and eye candy was all I needed to cleanse myself of the soul-sucking love vibes I'd been suffocating around for the last hour, and I wasn't wasting another godforsaken minute getting the hell out.

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NINETEEN

zac

IT WASN'T POSSIBLE to avoid King during the week, not when we shared an office and had to touch base daily about work, but damn if I didn't try. The problem wasn't that it was awkward or uncomfortable. Oh no. It was that my dick wanted to make my life hell by rising to get his attention any time he was near. How could it not? I hadn't figured out a way to calm down around him, and East wasn't making things easier by teasing and riling me up every chance he got.

Thank God King had left already to get a jump on spring break. It gave me time to focus on grading the last few assignments so I wouldn't have to work on them during my time off.

The door to the office burst open without so much as a warning knock, and East walked inside, a far-too-mischievous tilt to his lips as he shut the door and leaned against it. "Damn. I was hoping I'd catch you mid-coitus with our professor."

I shook my head and continued typing. "You just missed it."

"Don't tease me."

"I'm not. Hottest sex of my life."

East growled and pushed off the door. "I thought *I* was the hottest you ever had."

"Sorry. Guess you've been replaced."

My fingers flew off the keys as he jerked my chair back. He straddled me and sank down onto my lap, and I smirked at the pout on his lips.

"Jealous?" I said, and ran my hands along his perfectly pressed pants, moving up his thighs and then squeezing his firm ass.

“I don’t get jealous.”

“Liar.”

“I just don’t like to be left out of a good time.”

“So you *were* jealous.” I flexed my fingers and began to knead the tight muscles, keeping East right where he was. “It’s okay. You can admit it.”

“I’ll do no such thing.”

“Have it your way.” I tilted my head up like I was going to kiss him, and when he started to close the distance, I leaned back.

“Don’t be such a fucking tease,” he growled. He slid his hand around the back of my neck and pulled me back to his mouth. Warm lips crashed down on mine, taking control, and I let myself sink into him. Instantly all the tension from the week melted from my body, East’s tongue pulling focus as it swept along mine.

“Mmm.” I tugged at his shirt, pulling it loose from his pants, and then smoothed my palms up his lower back. His skin was scorching hot, and it made me want to feel the rest of his naked body against mine.

Not here, though.

I sucked on his lower lip before releasing it with a pop. This version of East, the one a little mussed, mouth swollen and clothes undone, was so damn hot.

Too bad he liked to open his mouth and ruin it.

He reached down between us to unbutton my pants, but I stilled his hand with mine.

“We can’t,” I said.

“We can.” He nipped at my lips and successfully flicked open the button this time, but I caught him before my zipper went down.

“East—”

“Your dick is as hard as mine; don’t even try to tell me you’re not dying for it. It’s been a week.”

God, I hated when he was right. I was starving for release, and here he was for the taking.

I moved my hands, letting him finish unzipping my pants, and said, “What’s gotten into you?”

“All my friends are assholes going away for break without me, and you’re gonna make me feel better.” He covered my mouth with his and then added, “Not to mention all this talk of King bending you over his desk makes me want to do it myself.”

“So basically you want to take your frustrations out on me?”

East cocked his head to the side, slipping his hands under the elastic of my briefs. “You got a problem with that?”

I grunted as his dexterous fingers wrapped around me to give a firm squeeze. “No, but don’t you think it’s a little risky doing it here?”

“That’s half the fun.” East leaned forward and grazed his lips over the top of mine. “Plus, most people have skipped out on their last class. Spring break, remember? Most of the professors took a half-day, too.”

I couldn’t fault his logic. King was one of them. Something I was pretty damn thankful for at this moment.

“Come on.” East began to rock over the top of my lap, his thumb grazing the head of my dick. “You know you want to.”

I did. Even more so now that his hands were working their magic. It’d been weeks since East had been inside me, and my ass missed the full stretch it would get from his nice, long cock.

“Fine, but you need to lock the door.”

“On it.” He went to slide off my lap, but before he could, I slid a hand up his back and gripped his neck, pulling that persuasive mouth back to mine. I needed another taste, and I needed it now. I swallowed his groan as he began to stroke my length, his hips no longer able to stay still even if he wanted them to. Any thought of this being the wrong place and wrong time was now gone under his sensual assault.

It wasn’t until the sound of the door handle being turned that my brain registered something other than East’s heavy breathing and the blood rushing around my ears.

And then the door opened.

“Zac, are you still—”

My hands immediately froze where they were as I ripped my mouth free of East’s. I didn’t need to look around his shoulder to know who was standing in the door, though.

I didn’t need to look to know who was now *closing* the door.

East, on the other hand, glanced over his shoulder, and the second he laid eyes on the man I shared my office with, a provocative smile curved his kiss-swollen lips.

“Professor Kingston, your timing is impeccable. Could you please lock the door for me? That way I don’t have to get off Zac. Well, you know,

move off his lap. A few seconds longer and I'll definitely be getting him off."

Fuck. Was East insane? Talking to King like that *here?* It was one thing to get mouthy with him when we were off Astor property, but to do it here, in the man's office? He was insane. A view I was sure King would—

The door clicked shut, and he flipped the lock.

I was about to shove East off my lap when I remembered that my pants were unzipped and my throbbing cock was poking out of my briefs.

"Oh," East said, licking his lips. "So you want to watch again, huh? I knew one time wasn't enough."

I swallowed as East turned back to me like King wasn't standing right there.

"Didn't I tell you he was picturing you bent over this desk?" My dick jerked in his hand as East rocked over the top of it. "Now he can watch for himself."

I finally looked at King, and though he hadn't said a word since he'd locked the door, his silence was deafening. His eyes were the color of midnight as they traveled down the back of East's writhing body. Was this really about to happen? Was King about to stand there and let East fuck me over his desk at *Astor*?

The thought was as ridiculous as it was unbelievably hot.

East slid off my lap, holding out his hand as he eyed my hard-on, and somewhere in the back of my mind I kept expecting King to say stop and put an end to this—but he said nothing. He remained silent as I got to my feet and East shoved my pants to the floor, and made no protest when East moved behind me and the sound of his zipper echoed around the office.

I might've thought King had stopped watching altogether if it weren't for the thick erection I could see between his legs as East pushed me forward until I was bent at the waist, hands braced on King's desk.

"Maybe when you see that your TA is as greedy a bottom as me, you'll want to step in and take a turn."

Still King said nothing.

Oh my fucking God.

My face burned as East ran his cock up and down the crack of my ass, then he gripped my cheeks, spreading me wide. I took a steadying breath and reached down to wrap a hand around the base of my own cock. But just

as East nudged my back entrance, King's gravel-rough voice filled the office.

"Stop what you're doing."

East's fingers froze at the exact moment mine did, then he shifted, the head of his cock teasing my eager hole again.

"We don't have to stop here, remember? This isn't your secret sanctuary. Out *here*, we can come whenever we want."

An untamed growl vibrated across the room, and I bit down on my lower lip. Between East and King, my dick was aching with how badly I wanted to come. East continued to tease me with deliberate strokes up and down the narrow strip of my ass.

"Unless you want to come with *me* inside you."

My head snapped up at King's words, and East stopped moving.

"Is that even an option?" he said as I tried to process what exactly we were negotiating here.

"I don't say things I don't mean." King's eyes shifted down to me. "You stop now, and you can have what was just promised."

"Both of us?" East said, ever the businessman, and King's lips curved into a lethal grin.

"Both of you."

Never had East and I agreed on something so fast. We straightened immediately.

"Good. I'll see you both after school. Be sure to pack a bag."

Then, before either of us could ask another question, King was gone.

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TWENTY

east

I'D NEVER PACKED so quickly in my life. Hell, I usually had someone do it for me, but not knowing where we were going or for how long had me stumped on what to bring. After all, we'd just be naked the whole time, right? Wasn't that what was about to go down? So what was the point of clothes?

Then again, I hated to be underdressed for any occasion, so I found myself tossing a random assortment of items into my leather weekender bag. As I zipped it shut, a message from an unknown number came through my phone.

UNKNOWN:
Five minutes

A thrill ran through me, anticipation making my body a live wire as I imagined King on the other side of that message, pulling up soon to whisk me away for a hot night. Or two. Maybe even three? It didn't fucking matter. I was ready.

I did a quick check of myself in the mirror, then grabbed my bag and headed out of the too-quiet condo. Screw West and JT and the dean and their pathetic Hamptons trip. That tragic mess was what happened when you let yourself get trapped in a relationship. It started out all hot and heavy, sex everywhere, and before you knew it, they had their claws in you deep and you were vacationing with their mom.

Not in a million fucking years.

As I stepped out of the elevator, I handed my bag to the staff waiting for me and headed through the lobby to wait for King's arrival. I wasn't sure if it would be him doing the honors or if he'd send a car.

What I *didn't* expect was for the same Rolls-Royce Phantom from the other night to pull in under the porte-cochère and idle expectantly. The driver, also the same one from before, rounded the car, greeting me by name with a curt nod before taking my bag from the staff and loading it into the trunk. Then he opened the rear door and ushered me inside.

The tantalizing scent of King's cologne in the enclosed space told me he was there before I saw him lounging casually in a pair of jeans and body-hugging navy sweater. Those dark eyes took in my every move as I debated where to sit.

Would his lap be too much, too soon?

Instead, I chose the seat beside him for now, leaving us separated only by the small console.

"You know, the last time I was in this limo it was Zac I was sitting next to." I ran my eyes around the interior. "Aren't we missing someone?"

The door shut behind me, and King inclined his head. "Yes, we're headed there next."

"I see." I preened a little at that. "So I was first."

"You were closest. Plus, I figured this would give us a moment to discuss your inability to keep your mouth shut. Something Zac doesn't have an issue with."

I eyed his spectacular body, my gaze landing on his lap. "I can think of several ways to keep me quiet."

"I'm serious, James." Quick as lightning King was gripping my chin and angling my face up to his. "What you were invited to last weekend, what you learned? It isn't some game. Twice this week you've spoken out of turn. You do it again, you're out."

"Fine." I bristled slightly at the dressing-down and jerked my face free. "Anyone ever tell you you're a hardass?"

"Yes. At least several times a week."

"Should be daily," I muttered.

"What was that?"

"Nothing."

“That’s what I thought. You have a lot to learn if you think I’m going to put up with your petulance over the next week.”

Week? Did he just say a week*?*

“I won’t tolerate bratty behavior in any form. You’re better than that. Prove it.”

“And if I don’t?”

King’s eyebrow shot up at my, yes, *bratty* response.

“What can I say? Some habits are hard to break.”

“Then you’ll be punished.”

If he wanted to deter me from acting out, he might want to change the way he was looking at me and issuing threats of punishment, because that voice had my dick standing up begging for him to do whatever the hell he wanted to me.

“Your wish is my command, King.”

He cocked his head to the side, looking at me as though I’d spoken in another language.

“King?”

Oh, right. He didn’t know we called him that. Or should I say, *everyone* at Astor called him that.

“Yes, don’t tell me you haven’t heard your nickname floating around school.”

“I can’t say that I have.”

“I see you hate it.” He actually looked pretty damn pleased with the title, which wasn’t that surprising. Who wouldn’t want to be viewed as a king?

“And tell me, did you and your friends come up with this or was it—”

“A mutual kind of understanding throughout the student body, is more like it. You know, because you’re terrifying in every way.”

As King opened his mouth to respond, the car drew to a halt and he glanced over my shoulder toward the window. “We’ll continue this discussion in a moment.”

The door opened and our third and final passenger entered the vehicle. Zac climbed inside, his thick hair slightly windblown and his eyes shifting between the two of us from behind his glasses.

He moved to the seat opposite King as the door was shut behind him. “Hi,” he said. “I see I’m the last one here.”

Who was the jealous one now? Not that *I'd* been jealous this week. But Zac had been so smug about pointing out my disappointment in being left out, it felt good to finally have the upper hand. So good I almost said so, until King's warning of being a brat flashed to the forefront of my mind.

"James's place was closest. It made the most sense."

"That's fine. I don't care." Zac looked around the limo as it pulled away from the curb. "Isn't this the same car from the other night?"

"Yes. It's mine. Jorge is my driver."

"Wait a second." I turned in my seat to face King. "You *own* a Rolls-Royce Phantom?"

"I do."

I scoffed and looked to Zac, whose eyes had just turned the size of saucers. He remembered the cost of one of these. "You don't get a car like this on just a professor's salary."

"Who said I'm just a professor?"

As that little morsel was thrown out, I tried to make sense of the enigmatic man beside me, but it was useless. The more I learned, the more I realized I didn't know half as much as I thought I did—and that just wouldn't do.

"What does that mean?" Zac asked. "I organize your schedule and I've never seen anything but school-related business."

"I know."

"Because you want to keep it a secret?" I pushed, but King gave us nothing, the fucker. Instead, he looked back to Zac with a question of his own.

"Do you also call me King?"

Zac's cheeks flamed as he pinned me with a fulminating look. He shook his head but turned back to his boss, mentor, soon-to-be fuck buddy, and confessed, "Yes."

"I see." King leaned forward and reached for the crystal decanter beside Zac. "I like it. It's going to sound good the next time you're kneeling at my feet."

Zac swallowed, his eyes glued to his ultimate fantasy, as King moved back to his seat and looked across at me.

"You too."

Fuck yes it would. "I'm happy to do the honors right here and now… *King*," I said. After all, why waste time talking when we could be getting

right to it in the comfort of a spacious limo?

He eyed me over his glass. “Patience has never been your strong suit.”

“No, sir.”

“Unlike Zac. Who has the patience of a saint.”

That was a laugh. “I wouldn’t call him a saint. You haven’t fucked him.”

“Yet.”

Zac was so still as he listened that I would’ve wondered if he was having any reaction at all, but then I could see the way he was holding on to his control by a fragile thread. He white-knuckled his armrest and propped his ankle up on top of his thigh to hide the way the fabric of his pants was pulled tightly across his hips.

There was a man dying to finally have his chance with King, and as he met my eyes, I saw the desire there didn’t only extend to our professor.

“Tell you what,” I said, holding Zac’s stare. “You can go first.”

King let out a low chuckle as he set his drink aside and stretched his long legs out in front of him. “You’re used to always being in control, aren’t you, James?”

“Yes.”

“But you let Zac fuck you.”

“So?”

King turned to Zac. “Does he always top from the bottom?”

Zac smirked. “He tries. All the fucking time.”

“Good to know.”

Silence descended then, as neither King nor Zac said anything else or made a move to get this party started. It *was* getting started, right? Maybe asking if I was always in control was King’s way of telling me to take the lead, and I was more than happy to accommodate.

I unbuttoned one sleeve, then the other, and started to remove the ascot at my throat.

King raised a brow. “Is it too warm in here for you?”

“Scorching, actually.”

He tapped the screen on the console, and a rush of cold air filled the vehicle.

“There,” he said, settling back in his seat. “That should cool you off.”

I frowned, dropping my hands into my lap. “I’m confused.”

“I think King’s trying to tell you nothing’s going to happen until we get to wherever we’re going,” Zac said, and I didn’t miss the way King’s eyes darkened in arousal at the use of his nickname. I looked to King for confirmation, and he nodded.

“Okaaay…” I said. “Well, do you want to fill us in on where that is?”

“No.”

“Is it the secret lair?”

He pressed his lips together.

“Don’t we need blindfolds if we’re going there? Are you gonna tie us up this time too?”

“East”—Zac gestured toward the bar—“why don’t you make a drink?”

“Do you really think that’s going to make me less impatient?”

Truthfully, it couldn’t hurt. I hated being left out of plans, but since King had given us a hell of a night before, I could relax and just go with it. Really, I could.

I reached for the bottle of vodka, and only then did I notice we’d crossed over into New Jersey on a route I knew all too well.

“Are we flying somewhere?”

“Why would you say that?” King said.

“Because we’re coming up on Teterboro.”

Zac looked out the window and frowned. “What’s Teterboro?”

“Seriously? Do you not take private planes?”

He shrugged. “My family likes to travel commercial.”

“My God, why?” A shiver racked my body, and I shook it off. Being stuck on a jet with hundreds of other passengers, terrible food, and crying kids would have me never wanting to travel again.

“Such a snob,” Zac said, his mouth quirked in amusement at my horror. If he’d said it once, he’d said it a million times, but it didn’t bother me. It just meant I had taste.

The limo passed through the security gate and toward a hangar, where an even nicer jet than the one my father had sat ready and waiting on the tarmac.

Damn, not bad.

“You two have another choice to make right now,” King said. “You can stay in this car and it’ll take you home. Or you can choose to spend the week with me.”

Zac’s lips parted. “A week?”

“Yes, that’s my offer. Nothing more, nothing less.”

I didn’t even have to think about it. A no strings attached week with King and Zac? He couldn’t have given me a better offer. “Hell yeah. I’m in.”

“Me too.” Excitement flared in Zac’s eyes as he scooted to the edge of his seat and peered out the window again.

Jorge opened the door for us, and as Zac led the way out, I said, “Hold on, did you blow your savings to rent this? Because we were already impressed by your cock.”

King pushed up his sleeves and looked down at me. “Remember what I said about being a brat.”

“They get spanked?”

“Don’t push it.”

Zac stood at the trunk, reaching for his bag, but Jorge said a few words to him and he backed away.

“They load them for you,” I said.

“I can carry my own bag a few feet.”

“Why when you don’t have to?”

Before he could hurl back a response about how entitled I was, I leaned in and surprised him by stealing a quick kiss.

“Just enjoy it. All your dreams are about to come true.”

Zac blew out a breath and ran his fingers through his hair. “And where exactly will that be happening?”

King paused at the steps that led into the plane and gave us both a wink. “Come with me and you’ll find out.”

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TWENTY-ONE

king

IF THIS DECISION ended up being a disaster, I'd blame it all on Archer. I had no business listening to my friend who'd gone and exploded his life a year ago, but here I was, in my private plane, about to land in my private sanctuary, and entertaining not one, but two brazen young men half my age.

It was lunacy, sheer insanity, yet somehow I couldn't find it in myself to give a damn.

Seeing Archer happier than ever had triggered something buried deep, something I hadn't thought about in years. What was the point of being one of the most powerful men in Manhattan if I didn't use it to my personal advantage? I had everything I'd ever desired and more, and it wouldn't kill me to have a little X-rated fun with these two.

Besides, they had no idea the bear they'd just poked. They assumed this was some hot rendezvous with their professor, that I was no one of importance in the grand scheme of things, but they couldn't be more wrong. I'd given them a glimpse the other night with the invitation that there was more going on than they ever realized, but even with East hiring investigators and hackers, neither of them had any idea who I really was outside of Astor. I'd gone to great lengths to keep my private life under lock and key, and here I was, opening up my world to a couple of sexy exhibitionists.

Maybe I was getting soft in my middle age.

My mouth curved behind my fist as I remembered East telling me in the limo that I should be called a hardass daily. He was right about that, even if

he didn’t know how far that role extended.

Our flight attendant returned, handing each of us a fresh drink. “The pilot said we’ll be landing shortly, Mr. Kingston.”

“Thank you.”

As she disappeared again and the jet began to descend, Zac peered out the window into the night, the full moon casting its light on the vast stretch of water below. A crease formed between his brows.

“You look worried,” East said, looking entirely at home in the luxury cabin with a martini glass dangling between his fingers. “Please don’t tell me you’re one of those people who claps when the plane lands.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“Then what’s with the face?”

“Just seeing a whole lot of water and not a whole lot of land.”

“Afraid you’ll have to swim?” East smirked before meeting my eyes. “Care to tell us where you’ve whisked us away to, since my phone’s not updating the location?”

“You’ll see,” I said.

“You really get off on this cryptic persona of yours, you know that?”

“I do. As much as I know it’s testing you not to have any control right now.”

East pouted, and Zac laughed, the tension that had crept into his face easing when he saw how put out his fuck buddy was.

“Gotta say, I like watching someone besides me put you in your place.”

“Neither of you should get used to that,” East said, before swallowing half of his martini. “Besides, I’m not *completely* unaware of our general vicinity in the world.”

Zac and I shared a look, and then I spread my hands wide. “Do tell us, James. Where are we?”

That gleam in East’s eyes reminded me of what Archer said about not underestimating him. “First of all, we haven’t been in the air long enough for a transatlantic flight, so that’s out. But we’ve been over water the entire trip, so that knocks out staying anywhere in the States. We sure as hell haven’t gone north without packing more layers, so the conclusion is obvious.” He drained his martini with a flourish. “We’re somewhere in the Caribbean.”

Impressive. He was paying attention, but I wouldn’t reward him yet. “Is that all you’ve narrowed it down to? That encompasses many countries.”

“Does it matter the name? One island’s as good as another.”

Zac groaned. “Professor, please tell me you brought a muzzle.”

“I’m not answering to that name on this trip, remember?”

Instantly, the temperature in the cabin changed. One minute it was teasing, and the next it was a fuck of a lot more scintillating. Especially when Zac licked his lower lip, leaving a glistening trail I couldn’t wait to suck on. If we weren’t about to land, I might’ve considered throwing out my plans and taking both of them right here, right now.

“Apologies,” Zac said, holding my stare. “*King*.”

Goddammit. That word on his tongue did things to my dick that would make it hard to walk out of here. It throbbed with anticipation, hard and insistent, ready for all the night would bring, and from the way they both began to shift in their seats with the kind of restlessness currently riding me, I knew they were just as on edge.

A few more minutes of tense silence and we finally landed with a jolt and began to taxi down to the hangar. Once we came to a stop, I swirled the last of my whiskey around the ball of ice and tossed it back.

Here we go.

The alcohol was helping as reality set in that I’d brought these two here for a week of whatever debauchery they wanted to get up to.

Or into.

I led the three of us down the steps and started toward the hangar, but East’s curse had me looking back.

“Hold on a second.” With narrowed eyes, he slowly took in our surroundings as Zac did the same, only with more surprise than suspicion.

Even though it was dark, the lights from the hangar and those from the main house at the highest point of the island showcased just *how* uninhabited it was.

“A private island, huh?” East said, stepping onto the tarmac. He slipped the bag the flight attendant handed him onto his shoulder and walked over to join me. “Whose?”

“Mine.”

He stared at me for a long moment. “*Your* island. As in you own it, you’re not just renting it for a few days.”

“East—” Zac started, but I held my hand up.

“Surprised? Bewildered as to how I could possibly have all of this and the Phantom too?”

“Yes.” East glanced back at the plane. “That’s yours as well?”

“It is.”

Something unspoken seemed to pass between East and Zac, and then the mouthy one cocked his head at me and said, “Are you Batman?”

Another long silence descended.

“Oh my *God*.” Zac’s head fell back, and he let out a litany of curses under his breath.

“What?” East said as I turned on my heel and unlocked my Ford Bronco. “He didn’t answer the question.”

“You’re an idiot.” Zac gave East a shove before loading his luggage in the trunk. He gestured for East to do the same, and to my surprise, he did.

I climbed behind the wheel, and before I could start the engine, Zac got in the passenger seat, leaving East to take the back. It was just part of the boldness I appreciated about Zac, even more so when he turned around and said, “I’m sure this is his too.”

“It seems Zac’s the brains of your duo.” I started the car and caught East’s eyes in the rearview mirror. “Which makes you the brat.”

The brat who made my cock hard and my palm itch with the urge to teach his insubordinate ass a lesson. I’d thought of how I wanted tonight to play out since I’d made the decision to bring them here. Who I wanted on their knees first, where I wanted it to happen. The memory of coating their faces with my cum… The sound of their begging me to fuck them… Catching them earlier today in my office. None of that started with a tour of the island, which was why I hit the gas and headed straight for the main house.

It was an ambient paradise, large and lush, as private as you could get. My staff had already left for the night, having gotten things ready for our arrival during our flight.

We had the place to ourselves. Every inch. And I intended to make good use of it.

It was far too quiet on the short drive, and it wasn’t until I pulled in at the front of the house that I realized why. Their jaws were on the floor as they both stared at the palatial estate. It was clear neither had expected this to be our final destination.

They practically stumbled out of the SUV and grabbed their bags. East shook his head like he was trying to clear it. “Who the hell *are* you?”

With my back turned, I smiled to myself, enjoying the utter perplexity that was flipping their worlds upside down.

I opened the arched iron door and gestured for them to enter first. “I’m just your humble professor.”

“I think you’ve proven that’s not entirely true—”

Zac cut off as he came to an abrupt stop in the foyer. His bag fell down his arm and hit the floor with a smack, but he didn’t seem to notice.

East whistled low as he strolled inside, nodding as he took it all in.

It was a breathtaking house, one I’d had built from the ground up years ago. Every little detail had been meticulously planned to suit my tastes, including the floor-to-ceiling glass doors that opened to let in the ocean breeze. It was the epitome of indoor-outdoor living, my own personal haven, and secretly I was pleased they both seemed to like it. I planned to have them come over every damn inch of it.

“Tell me this isn’t where you show us to our separate wings and tell us to get a good night’s sleep so you can go be a vigilante?” East said.

“No. It’s not.” I closed the door firmly shut and set my suitcase off to the side. My body hummed in anticipation as I turned to face them both. “As a matter of fact, neither of you will be sleeping tonight. Now get undressed.”

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TWENTY-TWO

east

KING'S COMMAND SHOT straight to my cock.

It wasn't my thing to follow instructions, but the implication of his words and where the night was now leading had me dropping my bag without any protest.

My jacket went first, something I wouldn't be needing in a tropical climate anyway. Out of the corner of my eye, Zac looked momentarily stunned at the turn of events, though he'd been slowly coming to terms with all of it since we drove onto the tarmac at Teterboro.

"That wasn't a suggestion, Zac," I said as I unbuttoned my shirt. "And you're so good at following King's orders, aren't you?"

From the way his dick jerked behind his pants, it wasn't a lack of interest that had him frozen. He'd admitted to wanting King for a long time, and now it seemed all his sexual fantasies were about to come true.

Although, really, that happened the first time we fucked, I was *sure*.

King's gaze traveled across the both of us, and as I added my shirt to the discarded pile on the floor, Zac quickly snapped into action. Shoes off, pants down, turtleneck gone, all in a matter of seconds. As he straightened, his cock jutted out, hard and flushed, and even I had to admit Zac was sexy as hell. He had a muscular physique, and there was a power in the set of his shoulders and the way he held himself that was such a turn-on.

I reached for the ascot at my neck, the last bit of clothing left, but King shook his head. "Leave that on."

Oh really…

I dropped my hands as King walked toward us. Clearly, he hadn't heeded his own demand, because his clothes were still frustratingly *on*.

He stopped in front of Zac, and even though he was only a couple of inches taller, he *felt* so much bigger. His sweater hugged strong biceps and a broad chest that I couldn't wait to finally see.

If he didn't decide to be a tease and only undo his zipper.

King curled his hand around the back of Zac's neck and pulled him in for a kiss that his TA responded to without hesitation. The possession he took of Zac's mouth had me wrapping my fingers around my dick, because damn they were hot. I wanted right in the middle of that erotic sandwich, especially when King's hand began to wander, trailing down Zac's neck, exploring his body with his fingers as continued the deep-throat assault of his mouth.

I was impatient, but even though I felt a pang of jealousy, I knew my turn was coming. *Save the best for last.*

Zac moaned against King's lips as our professor's fingers dipped down the line of his V and took hold of his erection. He gave him a couple of long, drawn-out pumps that had Zac reaching for him and putting his hands on his chest.

Okay, fuck that. I'm jealous now.

I moved to interrupt when King ripped his mouth away and wrapped his fingers around Zac's wrists like he was going to stop him from touching him further. Instead, he held him there and issued another command.

"Take it off."

Even from where I stood I could see the way Zac's eyes darkened behind his glasses. He was as turned on by that request as I was. When King dropped his hands by his sides, Zac reached for the bottom of his sweater and lifted it up over his head, revealing the body kept hidden away from us for good fucking reason.

Because if I'd seen what he was packin', I would've jumped his bones a long time ago.

Planes of smooth, dark skin came into view, the ridges of his abdomen tightening under our open-mouthed stares. *Holy shit.* No professor should ever look that damn good.

Zac was clearly having the same thought, because he was so focused on getting his greedy hands back on King that he haphazardly threw the sweater at my face.

“The fuck.” I balled it up, but the scent of King’s cologne made me stop before I tossed it with the rest of our clothes. It was intoxicating, and I brought it up to my nose and took a deep inhale. *God.* The man smelled like sex. I wanted to bathe in it. I rubbed the soft material down my body, over my naked chest, putting his scent all over me. But just as I lowered it to my hips, King turned his attention on me.

He slid out from Zac’s hold and took the sweater from me, dropping it on the ground. This close, I couldn’t tell where his pupils began, his eyes were so dark. And when he lowered his eyes to my mouth, I was ready for my kiss. Those full lips were made for biting, and I angled my head as he leaned forward—

“Unzip me.”

His breath on my lips was all the contact he made before he straightened and waited for me to follow the order.

If he thought I wasn’t dying to see that big cock again or get him as naked as we were, he’d underestimated my interest.

“I can handle that,” I said, reaching for the button of his pants and flicking it open with my thumb. King watched me as I lowered his zipper, brushing my knuckles against the erection barely contained by thin briefs. I wet my lower lip and curled my fingers beneath the waist of his briefs. All the blood pumping in my veins headed south as King’s awe-inspiring dick was revealed.

Fuuuuuck. The urge to taste him was overwhelming. I didn’t know how I managed to keep drawing his pants down. Maybe it was seeing his hard, thick thighs for the first time. Or wanting to strip him down so I could take in the whole picture he made.

I removed his shoes, and once he stepped out of his clothes, I slid them across the floor. The heat of Zac’s stare seared my skin as King lifted my chin with his thumb. He didn’t say a word, only nudged me to stand up. No sooner had I straightened than his mouth was on mine, those full lips pillow soft but firm—a man used to taking what he wanted. They plied mine open easily as his hands came up to hold my head, keeping me right where he wanted me.

Un-fucking-real. That was all I could think. All I could feel. Between the dominance of his tongue stroking mine and the way our dicks came into contact at our closeness, I was such a bundle of sensations that I couldn’t even try to play cool.

Out of pure instinct, I reached for his cock, and the moment I wrapped my fingers around him, a loud crack echoed through the room, followed by the shock of pain as King's hand made contact with my ass.

I gasped against his mouth as strong fingers gripped my wrist and yanked my arm up between us.

"Did I give you permission to do that?"

"No, but I thought—"

"Don't do that. Don't think." King put his lips by my ear. "Tonight, you are going to listen and do what you're told."

His warm breath against my skin made a shiver race up my spine, and while I'd usually push back against such an order, I wasn't going to risk missing out on my turn under that powerful body.

"Yes, *King*."

His lips twitched as he straightened to his full, glorious height, his eyes roaming over us. "Fucking gorgeous," he said, mostly to himself, then he turned and called over his shoulder, "Follow me."

Hell, I probably would've crawled after him if he'd told me to, and not a single person would blame me. The man looked as phenomenal from behind as he did the front. All those muscles rippling across his broad back, and his ass? *Fuck me.* It was so round and tight I wanted to take a bite out of it.

Or better yet, get on my knees and worship it.

"Pinch me," Zac said under his breath, his eyes roaming over the sex god who had just walked past the comfy couches and disappeared out of sight.

"Pinch you? Pretty sure he's gonna fuck you. Wouldn't you rather that?"

Zac's hand immediately moved to his dick, and we hurried after King. Seemed I wasn't the only one who didn't want miss out on what was about to come next.

Namely *us*.

We stepped through an archway that opened up to a grand dining room that, like the main living space, boasted floor-to-ceiling glass doors that opened to let the salty sea breeze in.

A view like that would be difficult to top under normal circumstances. But neither one of us was looking out at the ocean. The first thing that caught *our* attention was the eight seats flanking either side of an Empire-style double pedestal dining table—and King, who stood at the head of it.

“Zac? Come over here.”

Like a man in a trance, Zac immediately crossed to where King stood. I went to follow.

“You. Stay.”

I opened my mouth to protest, but his arched brow had me shutting it.

Oh, right, I was supposed to be doing what I was told.

Once he seemed satisfied I wasn’t going anywhere, King returned his attention to Zac, who stood beside him at the head of the table.

“You have a beautiful body,” King said in that growly voice, and it didn’t even matter that he wasn’t talking about mine—my cock kicked as though he was.

“I’m glad you think so.”

“I do.” King placed his hand on Zac’s chest, and I heard his gasp. “Your heart’s racing. Are you nervous?”

Zac—who had never had a shy bone in his body when it came to sex with me—shook his head. “Excited.”

“Good. I like that.” King smoothed his hand down Zac’s abs and teased the light dusting of hair that led to his dick.

“Ah, *shit*…” Zac reached for King’s arm as he swayed a little. Poor guy would probably faint when King finally touched his cock.

“Hmm,” King said as he looked to the table, then back to Zac. “Maybe we should get you off your feet.”

Oh my God, yes. *Please do what I think you’re about to do.*

“Why don’t you take a seat?” King ran his fingers over the shiny wooden surface. “Right up here on the table.”

Zac’s shoulders lifted with a sharp gulp of air before he shifted up onto the table and King moved in front of him to place a hand on his knee.

“Yes. That’s going to work well. Don’t move. I’ll be right back.”

King strode over to me. Hell yes, it was my turn. I stroked my hard-on as King approached, wondering where he was going to put *me*.

“James.”

That voice would forever play an essential role in any fuck fantasy I had from here on out. “Yes, my king?”

King’s eyes glittered, and my pulse pounded. His dominant side made my dick hard.

“Come with me.”

Anywhere, I almost said, but decided to just follow. Instead of leading me over to the table, though, he walked me right by Zac to the corner of the room.

"Kneel."

I looked back at Zac, who had one hand braced on the table beside him, his legs dangling off the end of it, his cock in hand.

Why was King putting me over here if the action was going to happen over there?

"I don't understand."

"You disobeyed me twice this week. Three times, if I'm counting right now. So this is your punishment."

"My *punishment*?" I scoffed, but quickly shut my mouth when King took a step forward.

"Yes. You're going to kneel in this corner with your hands behind your back and *watch* while I fuck Zac."

"Wait, so I can't even touch—"

"Kneel. Or leave. Those are your two options."

My jaw hurt with how hard I clenched it, but King knew he had me. There was no way I was about to leave, even if I wasn't allowed to touch anyone—including myself.

I slowly sank to the hardwood floor, my hungry gaze locking on his cock. But a finger under my chin had me looking back up to his face. Then he untied my ascot and slid it free.

"Don't pout. Now open wide," King said as he balled the silk in his hand and stuffed it between my lips. "*Don't* spit this out. Remember, you're the one who said Zac could go first."

Something I was regretting at this moment as King walked over to the china cabinet and pulled out a box of condoms and a bottle of lube.

Holy shit. He'd *gagged* me? And I was supposed to just sit here and take it?

Who was I kidding? I would've done anything he asked me to get what was currently heading Zac's way. At King's approach, Zac spread his legs a little wider.

My balls ached as I watched the two in the middle of the room, and I had to admit, I had pretty good view, all things considered.

King put the bottle on the table and tore open one of the condom packets with his teeth, then he handed it over to Zac.

“Put it on me.”

Zac took the condom and rolled it down King’s thick pole, no doubt imagining how good it was going to feel when it split him in half.

Lucky fucker.

“You can touch me,” King said when Zac snuck a quick squeeze the way I’d tried. But unlike me, King *allowed* his hand. “Learn every inch of me. Understand exactly who it is that’s about to take you.”

I moaned around the gag as Zac began to pull and stroke King’s erection, and when King grabbed the back of his neck and pulled him in for a kiss, I growled.

Jealousy wasn’t something I was used to feeling. Mainly because no one ever had anything I wanted. But when King thrust his tongue in between Zac’s lips, I couldn’t decide what I wanted more: that deep tongue fuck of a kiss, or my hands learning the cock I knew could destroy me in the best way ever.

Every nerve in my body felt wired as King pulled his lips free of Zac’s. Then he put a hand to his shoulder and pushed him down on the table, until Zac was laid out like an offering for a king.

“Damn.” King’s tone was reverent as he looked over his TA, and I had a feeling he would never look at Zac the same way again. I sure as shit hadn’t after our first time together. “Spread your arms out to either side of the table for me.”

Zac, ever the good student, did as he was told, reaching for and gripping either side of the table. King stroked his fingers up the underside of Zac’s shaft, and the quick snap of his hips into the air had a sensual chuckle filling the room. “So sensitive,” he mused, then tapped on his right knee with his other hand. “Put this foot up on the table.”

Zac quickly did as he was told, so turned on I doubted there was anything he wouldn’t do.

“I wonder if you’ll be as sensitive to my mouth.”

Zac nodded and pushed his hips up in a not-so-subtle message to do it so we could find out. The way King had Zac positioned, his closest leg swung down off the table, ensured nothing obstructed my view of what was about to happen between his thighs.

Something I was sure King had planned all along.

“Why don’t we find out?” King lowered down over Zac and flicked his tongue across the head of his dripping cock, and when Zac’s hips thrust up

off the table, he sucked him into his mouth.

“Ah fuck. *Fuuuck*.” Zac reached for King as the professor’s lips began to move up and down his shaft.

King growled, a feral kind of sound that had my hands clenching into fists, and as if he could see behind my back, King tilted his head a fraction and caught my eye as Zac’s rough thrusts got even faster.

It was one of the hottest things I’d ever seen, and I was strangely proud of Zac for going after what he wanted. I shifted on my heels, moving my hands under my thighs as my dick all but begged me to take hold of it. But I sat still. No matter how badly I wanted to go over and join in, I wanted my own chance under him more.

King returned his attention to Zac, who’d gotten more vocal with every suck. He dragged his lips off Zac’s cock and grabbed the lube.

I could hear Zac breathing hard as he stared up at King. “Hands back where they were,” he told Zac as he reached down and cradled his balls. “It’s time to get you ready for me.”

“I’m ready now,” Zac panted as he reached for the edge of the table. I couldn’t blame him for wanting to rush it, but had he seen the same cock I had?

“Not yet,” King said, slipping a finger down and finding Zac’s hole. Zac bucked up, trying to get more. “Mmm,” King said. “Let’s get another in you.”

I’d *told* him Zac was a greedy bottom.

King slipped two fingers in then, and pre-cum dripped from both mine and Zac’s dicks.

“Look at you,” he said, and did just that as he scissored his fingers inside of Zac, stretching and widening his greedy hole.

“So turned on,” Zac moaned.

“Which is exactly the way I want you. I wonder, can you take three?” King looked over at me. “James? Can he take three?” He held them up, and my mouth watered around the gag like he was about to use them on me.

I nodded, still unable to speak.

King moved his hand back between Zac’s thighs, slowly pushing those thick digits inside. Zac whimpered, his head rolling back and forth on the table as his erection wept for attention.

“Let go of the table,” King ordered him, and the next moment he was grabbing Zac under his bent knee and pulling his ass to the edge of the

smooth surface.

My heart thundered as I watched with rapt attention when King directed the head of his cock to Zac's eager entrance—then pushed inside. I dug my nails into the undersides of my thighs as I watched every thick inch disappear inside of Zac, and only when King was fully seated did I realize I needed to breathe.

That was when I heard the other two in the room, their heavy breathing matching my own as King began a slow roll of his hips, dragging himself from Zac before plowing back into him.

Jesus Christ, that was so fucking hot. I didn't know where to look. Zac had reached down to take hold of his dick and was stroking in time with the ever-increasing pace King was setting, and King? His ripped body was all tense muscles as he fucked Zac exactly like I knew he would—an animal.

He was hard, rough, and wild—a dominant alpha, just as I expected—and my ass ached to get taken by him.

"*King…*" Zac shouted as he craned his head back on the table, and King pulled his other leg up so he could hammer into him with ferocious vigor.

"*Take* it, Zac. *Feel* it," King grunted on each thrust, and I almost came from that alone.

Zac cried out at his words, and I moved up on my knees to watch as King's pounding shoved him back up the table.

God yes, I wanted that, so much I might beg for it once they got through.

Zac strangled his dick as he feverishly stroked himself toward orgasm. He had to be close now—I sure as hell was.

King pulled out of him and put Zac's feet back on the table. Then he rolled his condom off and tossed it to the floor. "Now, show me how you're gonna come whenever you think about me fucking you like *that*."

Zac moaned and arched up off the table, pushing his cock through his viselike fist, and in less than two strokes, hot jets of cum shot up his chest. A savage growl ripped from King's throat at the sight, and he milked his own cock just as hard before making a sticky mess of his TA, and the breathing in the room was almost as loud as the crashing waves outside.

It wasn't until I heard *my* name that I realized the ringing in my ears and harsh breathing was my own. I blinked once, twice, and focused on King's towering figure as he turned to fully face me and crooked a finger.

"Come here, *now*."

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TWENTY-THREE

zac

HOLY FUCKING SHIT.

I could barely catch my breath or my thoughts as the magnitude of what just happened started to settle in.

I'd just had mind-blowing, explosive sex with King, and it was better than any of the fantasies I'd had of us together. He completely dominated, and it was so damn hot I was grateful it had happened here and not back in the city. At least here it was practically a given it would happen again…and again…during what I hoped was a week-long sexcapade.

My chest continued to rise and fall, my vision slowly coming back as King curled his finger at East, who had been kneeling on the floor gagged and watching us with lust-filled eyes and a substantial amount of jealousy.

East. On the floor. It was a shocking sight, one I would put money on had never happened before in his life. Not that he wasn't deserving of his punishment. He *was* East, after all, and with a mouth that shameless, he was learning fast who the real top was in this scenario.

Rising to his feet, East followed King's instructions, even if it was with a petulant tilt of his lips. He didn't like coming second—in both senses—and I couldn't deny the sense of satisfaction that flowed through me. Even if it was the post-orgasm comedown talking.

King took hold of East's chin, pulled the silk material out of his mouth, and then brushed his thumb across to wipe the expression off his lips. "I take it you've learned your lesson?"

East glanced over at where I lay on the table, King's cum and mine covering my chest and stomach. "I have."

“And just how do you think I should reward you for following my rules?”

“By fucking me until I can’t stand anymore…*King*.”

King took hold of East’s rock-hard cock and gave him a squeeze. “Think I should give him what he wants, Zac?”

I didn’t know how it was possible that my dick stirred with interest already, but it had a life of its own. And I desperately wanted to see King in action again.

I licked my lips and nodded. “I do. I’d like to watch…”

Heat flared in his dark gaze, and he turned back to East and gave him another long stroke. “You deserve that, do you?”

“Yes— Oh *fuck*.” East’s head fell back and he sucked in a breath as King teased one of his nipples with his tongue and continued to work his dick. “Fuck yes, I deserve it. Please.”

That was how I knew he felt desperate. *Please*. Missing out on round one had forced him to rethink his attitude, at least for the moment.

“Turn around,” King said. “Hands on the table on either side of Zac’s hips.”

I hadn’t been able to peel myself off the table yet, and it looked like that was a good thing. Whatever King had in mind, I was down for it, even if it was just the view of these two getting it on.

East again obeyed orders as he turned to face me. His eyes widened slightly at the amount of cum painting my body before he slapped his palms down on the table on either side of me and braced himself.

“Looks like I’m going to make an even bigger mess of you,” East said with a smirk seconds before King landed another loud smack on his ass.

“I didn’t give you permission to address him.”

East bit down on his lower lip, his pupils growing large as he continued to look at me. “My apologies, King. Please, may I have another?”

Another crack echoed off the walls as King’s palm made contact with his other cheek, and East gave a guttural shout.

A sinful smile curled King’s lips as he lowered his mouth right by East’s ear. “You say Zac wanted to be the one bent over, but I have a feeling *you’re* really the one who gets off on it.”

East moaned and angled his head to the side as King licked a path down his neck.

“Say it.” King’s voice was low and dangerous, his hips moving up and down behind East to tease his cock between his ass cheeks. “*Yes, King.*”

“Fuck yes, King.”

“Very good.”

King straightened and forced East’s spread legs wider with his own. Then he flattened his palm on East’s back, pushing him down onto me, and smoothed his hands over East’s ass. He plumped them and spread his cheeks apart, then leaned over and began to tongue East’s tight hole. I knew just how tight and hot it was, and that, along with the visual of King taking what he wanted, had my cock getting hard again.

Jesus. I was gonna go for a fucking record tonight, I could feel it.

I reached up and pinched East’s nipples, rubbing them between my fingers. He was sensitive there, and he writhed and bucked back on King’s face.

The way King’s hands gripped him, holding East like he was only there for King’s pleasure, was one of the sexiest things I’d ever seen.

Was this real? All of this was too good to be true, which meant I had to be hallucinating, because surely King whisking us away to his private island to fuck us was something that only made sense in a wild fantasy. Not real life.

But East felt real under my hands. His grunts sounded real, and King’s cum drying on my skin was definitely real.

“Wrap your legs around him,” King ordered me as he stood up and rolled another condom on his impossibly hard-again cock. I followed his request, twining my legs around East’s lower back and crossing my ankles to keep him right where King wanted him.

The way my erection rubbed up against East’s body told me this was going to be the most delicious torture once King got started, and I ran my fingers through the cum lingering on me to coat my dick.

“Always the brains,” King said before swiping some onto his fingers to lube himself as well. “And an insatiable hot bottom.”

I preened under the praise as East let out a frustrated whine and bucked back again, clearly missing King’s touch. But my job was to hold him right where King wanted him, and I tightened my thighs so he couldn’t use his body to make demands our professor didn’t want to give…yet.

“That’s right. Keep our wild boy from topping from the bottom.”

Husky and low, King's voice gave me goosebumps, and had East looking down at me with pure hunger in his eyes. I knew exactly what he was feeling. So ready, so eager, his cock probably dripping pre-cum onto the hardwood floor.

The second King breached his hole, East's breath left him in a heavy exhale and he dropped his head.

I couldn't decide where I wanted to look more—at East as he lost control, or at King, who was in *full* control. Both were so incredibly erotic. With every thrust, East's abs rubbed against my cock sandwiched between our bodies, and the friction had my eyes rolling in the back of my head.

I wasn't just a voyeur this round, I was right there with them as King fucked East at a pace that I didn't even think I could manage after getting off already.

"*King*," East said on a ragged breath. "*God* yes, just like—"

King shoved inside him so hard he collapsed on top of me, unable to keep himself braced. I cursed, my dick taking the weight of his body, but every jolt had me closer and closer to the brink.

East, on the other hand, was blissed out beyond recognition as King grabbed hold of his dick to jerk him off while never letting up on the pace.

Through the haze of lust, I watched King, his neck corded with tension, his powerful body pumping into East in a way I knew would be seared into my mind forever.

It was so goddamn sexy. The harsh breathing in the room was a symphony in my ears as my balls drew up tight from the delicious pressure of every drive. I struggled to keep my legs in place as I began to fall apart for the second time, my climax exploding in a hot, sticky eruption between us. I didn't know if it was East shouting or the roar of blood in my ears as he started to jerk out of rhythm.

"Not yet," King said roughly, his eyes closing briefly before they opened again and locked on mine. I swallowed hard, struggling for breath as King then gave East the order to come. Like he couldn't have held on another second, East shouted as his entire body began to convulse with the force of his orgasm.

"God*damn*," he said, meeting my eyes as a satisfied smile tipped one side of his mouth.

King pulled out of him and ripped off the condom, and on instinct, I drew my legs back down from where they'd been so tightly wrapped around East.

Seconds later, milky jets of King's cum sprayed East's back, marking him the same way he'd marked me. The same way he'd marked us both that night we received the invitation.

It felt possessive in a way I couldn't describe and didn't care to. It made me feel wanted and desirable in a way I'd only ever felt with East. Not that I'd ever admit that to either of them. Both had egos that didn't need any more inflating, but maybe that was what made them so fucking sexy. Two men, so dynamic and powerful in their own ways, who wanted nothing more than to spend a week on a beach fucking me senseless.

If this is a dream, I thought as I dipped a finger in the mess on East's back and brought it between my lips, *nobody better fucking wake me.*

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TWENTY-FOUR

king

I ALWAYS WOKE up with the dawn, whether I was in the city or on the island. I'd never needed much shuteye, not when there was always a call, or an email, something or someone that needed my attention.

So imagine my surprise when I woke up to the sun high in the sky, the morning already passing me by. I listened for the sound of movement, but the house was quiet. I'd well and truly worn the three of us out, but damn I couldn't remember having a more satisfying night. Standing under the steam shower before passing out had been smart, minimizing the ache in my body as I slid out from under the sheets and got to my feet.

I slipped on a pair of shorts and headed to the kitchen for a coffee. The doors to both rooms I'd shown the guys to were still shut, giving me an absurd sense of satisfaction. What could I say? All that pent-up tension served its purpose.

My staff had stocked the kitchen with everything we'd need and more, down to the platters of sliced local fruit and pitchers of freshly squeezed juice. I opted for a coffee first, but hesitated when I grabbed the single-serve pod.

Did Zac and East drink coffee? I'd often seen Zac arrive with a travel mug, but I couldn't be sure what was inside, and keeping some sense of boundaries meant I'd never asked.

Deciding on a different approach, I put the pod back in the drawer and brewed a big pot instead. That way they'd have the option to indulge or not.

If they emerged before dinnertime.

Steaming mug in hand, I headed out to the back, where a spread of comfortable lounge chairs overlooked the gorgeous, clear blue waters and powdery-white beaches. It was paradise. Not a cloud in the sky and a steady, balmy breeze that kept it from ever feeling too hot. No crowds or tourists littering the view, just peace.

I took a sip of the scalding brew—just the right temp—and faltered as an even better view caught my eyes.

Zac laid out on a lounger, the top half of him positioned in the shade with his long legs spread out to get a little sun. At my approach, he looked up and immediately scooted to a sitting position.

"Oh hi, um, I'm sorry. I wasn't sure when you'd be up, so I came out here for a little bit. But if you'd rather I—"

"Zac." I held up a hand. "You're fine. You're welcome to enjoy any part of the island. Relax, maybe even breathe for a second."

He took in a breath as I settled into the lounger beside his.

"How about we try this again?" I asked.

Zac shifted until his legs were stretched out again, but I didn't miss the nervous way his Adam's apple bobbed. "I'd like that."

I ran my eyes down his naked torso, then back up to his handsome face. "Good morning."

Zac chuckled. "Morning."

"It's not a good one?"

"What? Oh. Yes, of course it's a good one." He shook his head and muttered, "Stop talking, idiot."

I put my coffee mug on the table beside the lounger and reached over to put a hand on Zac's arm. The second my fingers touched him, his head whipped around and his eyes met mine.

"I know this has to be a little bit difficult for you," I said. "Last night was—"

"Hot as hell."

"Yes. It was that. But it also changed the dynamic between us, and I want to make sure that you're okay with that."

"I am," Zac said without hesitation. "It's just taking me a second to wrap my head around the fact that it happened in the first place. I've wanted it for so long, and…" His cheeks turned that delicious shade of pink.

"Now you can't stop thinking about it?"

"Yes."

“Neither can I.” I brushed my thumb across his lips. “We aren’t at Astor, Zac. This week, I’m not your professor. You want something, ask me for it.”

“Just like that?”

“I didn’t say you’d get it.” I winked, and that flush deepened. “But you should definitely ask.”

Zac chuckled as I settled back in my lounger and reached for my coffee, the awkward tension now gone and replaced with a sexual one.

“It’s not just what we did that I’m trying to wrap my mind around. But also *this*.” He swept his arm out across the spectacular view. “East is right to ask who you are, because I have no clue, and I work with you daily.”

“I know, but it wasn’t time.”

“And now it is?”

“It’s getting closer.”

“So cryptic. I guess you really do fit in with the whole secret organization deal.”

This was the first time Zac had made mention of the recruitment night, which wasn’t that surprising, since he understood how to follow an order, unlike East. But it also got me wondering how he felt about the invitation.

I’d known East would jump at such an opportunity, but Zac I’d been unsure about. He wasn’t the kind to flaunt his family’s wealth or connections, especially around Astor. I would even bet money that East had no idea who his parents were, considering their sexual arrangement didn’t seem to include any kind of personal intimacy.

No, that wasn’t entirely accurate. Despite their insistence that their arrangement was nothing more than a hookup, it was obvious there was a level of respect there that neither of them seemed to realize.

I couldn’t think of one person—including East’s friends—he let get away with ordering him around the way Zac did when their clothes came off, and when they were back on, the sparring between the two of them was layered with a mutual kind of affection I hadn’t expected.

I’d often thought Zac forgot how to have fun and be a student, given how conscientious and focused he was around me. But with East those walls came down, and I was learning there was a whole other side to my TA.

So it seemed we’d all managed to surprise each other.

“And you?” I said, eyeing Zac over the rim of my mug. “Do you think that’s something you’d be able to fit into?”

“I think so? But I want to know more.”

Of course he did. He wouldn’t be Zac otherwise.

“We’ll get there, when it’s time.”

Zac was about to respond when the sound of a loud yawn had us both looking toward the main house. Standing in the archway that connected the indoors with the outdoors stood East, coffee cup in hand, towel slung low around his waist and hair wet and mussed from what I assumed was a long, hot shower.

He took a sip of his drink, then a let out a sigh. “Now *this* is the life I deserve.”

Zac snorted a laugh and turned his head toward me. “Look what you’ve done. Encouraged the monster.”

I had indeed, but I didn’t regret that decision. Not when East walked over to join us, his sinewy body on display. With his hair dripping rivulets down his neck and chest, he was a stunning sight.

“Are we the only ones here?” he asked.

“We are.”

“Should we be scared?”

“Probably.”

East’s eyes took on an expression that was full of mischief as he drank from his mug and then shrugged. “Well, I’m not.” He ripped his towel off and tossed it in my lap, revealing every inch of his naked body. “Goodbye, tan lines.”

Zac’s jaw dropped at East’s outlandish behavior as I picked the towel up and let it dangle from my finger. “Good to see someone’s feeling at home this morning.”

East glanced over his shoulder at the rolling waves, as comfortable in his skin as he would be wearing a thousand-dollar suit and an ascot.

“Who wouldn’t feel at home?” He turned back to Zac and rolled his eyes. “Seriously? You’re still hung up on having a little luxury in your life?”

“No. I was just thinking about everything that happened last night—”

“So was I,” East interrupted, reaching down to stroke himself. But Zac completely ignored him, clearly used to this teasing side of East.

“—and was getting everything straight in my head.”

East’s eyes flicked between the two of us and then down to his hard dick. “I’m sorry, but were we at the same wel*coming* party last night?

Because from what I remember, there was not one straight person in sight.”

I cleared my throat. “Tell me something, James. Do you always use sex as a deflection when you’re uncomfortable in a situation?”

As suspected, East leaned back against the stone rail of the balcony, spread his legs, and gave himself another stroke. “Do I *look* uncomfortable to you?”

“No. You look sexy. Something I’m sure you’re very aware of, since you like to use it at every given opportunity to get your way.”

East brushed his thumb over the head of his dick. “And that’s a bad thing?”

“It’s an interesting thing.” I got to my feet, tossing his towel over my shoulder, and he pumped himself a little faster at my approach. “You see, whenever the conversation veers into something beyond the surface, you make a detour to sex.”

My hand whipped out and halted his in place.

“And while I appreciate that at certain times, I’d also enjoy some conversation with my two guests over the next week.”

East stared up at me, his eyes darkening as I dragged his fist up his length.

“Zac was just telling me how it was taking him a minute to get used to seeing me—*all* of me—outside of Astor. Are you trying to tell me you have no thoughts on that?”

East’s breathing came faster, his eyes shifting over my shoulder—looking for his usual escape route or distraction from the more difficult questions.

“Don’t look at him,” I said. “He’s not going to help you.”

“Fuck,” he said, jamming his hips forward.

“Not on the table this morning.” I chuckled. “Literally.”

Defiance flashed through East’s eyes. “It was *unreal* seeing you like that, okay? All strong and alpha.”

My lips curled a fraction.

“That what you want to hear?” East licked his full lips. “That I bow to your greatness, my king?”

Brat.

I let him go, making him gasp as I took a step back and threw the towel at him.

“No, but until you can hold a conversation like an adult, you won’t be getting anything else from *me*, little prince.”

East opened his mouth, no doubt to hurl back some smartass retort, but before he could get anything out, I turned my back on him and looked to a smirking Zac.

“Would you like some breakfast?”

He got to his feet, clearly more comfortable now, since he didn’t even bother to cover the erection my interaction with East had caused. “I’d love some.”

“Perfect.” I gestured to the open door, and as Zac disappeared inside, I glanced at East. He was where I’d left him standing by the rail, his lips pulled tight, his jaw twitching with frustration.

Did I want to go back over there and stroke him to orgasm, yes, I did. But I also wanted him to drop the façade. He was about to step into the real world and have real power at his fingertips, and he needed to know how to wield it and not act so impulsively.

I was reminded of Archer’s warning that East needed a firm hand, so I turned and followed Zac inside before I called over my shoulder, “Enjoy working on those tan lines, James.”

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TWENTY-FIVE

zac

I WAS NEVER leaving. This place was paradise, and so was the man who apparently owned it all.

I leaned over the kitchen island, picking through the options and decided on starfruit while East finished off another coffee beside me. I had so many questions for King, but for the moment, I was content to enjoy this little slice of heaven. No need to question it, not when King had his own timeline for when he wanted things to happen. Surely we'd get some answers before the end of our trip…and if not, the sex made it all more than worth it.

As I finished off the last bite of starfruit, its juice rolled down my hand, and the next thing I knew East had a hold of my wrist and brought my fingers up to his mouth. Hazel eyes, more gold than brown today, glinted as he licked the juice trailing down my skin.

I raised a brow as he sucked my index finger into the warm heat of his mouth. "What are you doing, trouble?"

He shook his head and continued with my middle finger, and my dick throbbed.

"East…"

He drew his mouth off me but didn't let go of my wrist. "Yes?"

He knew exactly what he was doing but batted innocent eyes at me. It was a night-and-day difference from the hours we'd spent at the mercy of King's incredible cock.

"Doesn't your ass need a rest?" I teased as he brought my hand to rest against his bare chest. At least he'd managed to put his damn towel back on

for breakfast, or I would've been tempted to take him up on what he was offering.

"Probably, but I figured you could just keep me ready for the next time King wanted another go around. Lord knows we're gonna have stay prepared if we plan to keep taking that big, beautiful dick."

"I'm sure there'll be other things to occupy your time besides that."

"Better than sex?"

"I didn't say better. I said other."

"Where's the fun in that?" East nipped at the tip of my finger as King returned with a stack of plush towels in his arms.

"Starting something without me?" he asked, and I grinned and pushed East away.

"He's definitely trying to start something. Might need to find a way to keep him busy."

"Well, just give me the Wi-Fi password and I'll harass all my friends who decided to go on romantic vacations without consulting me."

"No Wi-Fi," King said, slipping his feet into a pair of slides by the door. "No cable either."

East's mouth fell open. "Excuse me? Did you say you have no connection to the outside world on this island?"

"There's a landline in the kitchen."

"Oh…my…God. But how do you function? Doesn't your secret society gig require you to be reachable?"

"I don't want to be reachable. Not here." He started out to the back patio, and I laughed at the way East was still sputtering as I followed.

"Well, I'm impressed," I said. "We're all too addicted to our phones anyway."

"But…" East trailed after me. "What are we gonna do out here?"

King tossed us both a towel. "I thought we'd start with a swim."

Now *that's* what I was talking about. The pool had been catching my eye since I'd walked out here this morning to get a better look at the island, but King bypassed the path that led to it and headed toward the ocean.

"Uh." I halted my steps, my stomach beginning to flip over the thought of getting in there.

East glanced over his shoulder and paused. "What's the problem? Can't swim?"

“No, I can swim, I just, uh…” I shook my head, trying not to imagine all the fish, seaweed, deep-sea creatures, and undertows.

“Zac?” King said. “Is this okay?”

“Oh yeah, of course. I mean, you two go ahead. I’m not really an ocean kind of guy.” I tried to play it off, but I heard the way it sounded out of my mouth. Not even the promise of King and East all wet and naked would get me in there past my toes.

“I can work with the pool,” East said. “That way we can avoid sand in unwanted places should anything come…up.”

“I mean, only if you want to. I’m happy to hang up here while—”

“It’s cool—right, King?” East looked back to King for permission, and I didn’t even think he realized he’d done it.

“Of course. I don’t want you to do anything you’re uncomfortable with.”

“Thanks, I appreciate that,” I said. “I just never got into the whole salt and sand thing.”

East shook his head and started up the path toward the pool as King fell into step beside me.

“How long did you say you two have been together?”

I glanced over at King, who was watching East from behind his sunglasses.

“We aren’t *together* together.”

“Ah, that’s right. Yet he’s very…mindful of your wants when it comes to certain things.”

East mindful of anything other than himself? Now that was a laugh.

“When it comes to sex, maybe, but that’s about it.”

“That’s not true. Take now, for example. He was the first to mention the pool. He didn’t make fun of you, and he made sure I would go along with his plan.” King grinned. “He was taking care of you.”

I snorted, the idea so ridiculous I didn’t even know how to respond.

“You think I’m wrong?”

“Yes. You’re absolutely wrong. East doesn’t take care of anyone but himself.”

“You know,” East called out as he tossed his towel over a lounger and moved to the end of the pool. “This pool might just outdo the one at the Waldorf.” Then he executed a perfect dive into the deep end.

“God, he’s such a snob.” I chuckled. “You think someone who lives at place like the Waldorf and only travels by private jet can really care about anything other than how to keep all of that?”

“I can.”

My feet faltered a little at that. My brain was still not connecting the man who owned this private island to the professor I’d worked so closely with over the years.

“Okay, so maybe I’m the one that needs to be a little more open-minded.”

“*Or* maybe just be open to someone surprising you every now and then.”

“Yeah, I’m learning that, *professor*.”

He chuckled and headed toward the pool to join East. After taking off his sunglasses, he dove into the deep end and cut through the water with clean, smooth strokes, swimming to where East was lounging on the tanning shelf.

“You’ve got a nice stroke,” East said as King moved up to a spot beside him.

“A pun?”

“That too, but I actually mean it. One of my only requests when deciding where I’d be living out my college years was that the place have a spectacular lap pool.”

I laid my towel over the back of a lounger, choosing to sit on the edge of the pool first and get a bit of sun. I let my legs slip into the cool water and leaned back on my hands. “I didn’t know you were a swimmer.”

East shrugged. “It’s not really a group activity.”

“How come you’re not on the swim team?”

“Because I don’t want to be.” He brushed a fly from his knee before lowering it into the water.

“Couldn’t deal with someone blowing the whistle at you every five seconds to tell you to fix your form?”

“My *form* is fucking perfection.”

“Sure it is,” I said, shooting him a wink.

“But if you must know, I swim to unwind and relax. If I were to make my hobby a sport, I’d never be able to clear my head.”

“From your busy prank-planning schedule?” King asked.

I snorted as East shook his head. “From my father.”

King’s eyes flashed with what looked like concern, but it was gone so fast I thought I’d imagined it. It was clear he wanted to ask more, and now I was curious why East needed an escape. We hadn’t exactly opened up to each other about our lives before. Hell, I hadn’t even known he enjoyed swimming.

“Why would you need to clear your head from your father?” I asked.

“Because he’s a demanding son of a bitch, that’s why.” He lifted a shoulder. “All rich moguls are.”

I looked to King, who had to fall into that category somehow. We didn’t know shit about what he really did, who he really was, but all we’d learned about him so far certainly followed the rich mogul track. So did the demanding part—not that either of us were complaining.

“Are you…involved in his business?” King asked. It didn’t escape my notice that he seemed to be choosing his words carefully.

“Oh, you know, here and there. It’ll be more when I graduate. I *do* have a busy schedule right now, as you know.” East smirked. “All those pranks to plan.”

There he was. That impish side was never too far away, always just under the surface.

I pushed off the tanning ledge into the water, going under to get my whole body wet before breaking back through the surface. King and East watched as I stood up, the water lapping at my waist.

“Oh fuck it,” East said, getting up to join me. “Who needs a tan?”

He dipped under the water, and just when I expected him to surface, I felt his arms wrap around my legs to pull them out from beneath me. I fell back and barely had time to hold my breath before crashing under.

“You fucker,” I sputtered, wiping my face as East laughed from somewhere behind me.

“You really should be more prepared,” he said as I turned to face him. “Aren’t you the brains? Gotta be ready at all times for a surprise atta—”

He was dragged under the water by a dark figure beneath the surface, and I glanced back at the ledge to see King had silently disappeared while we weren’t watching.

He and East came up for air at the same time, and King licked the water from his upper lip. “You were saying?”

East slicked his hand back over his hair, and where I thought I’d see a scowl, there was a small smirk. “Would you look at that? Mr. Hardass

knows how to have a good time."

King swept his gaze around his gorgeous property. "Was that ever a question?"

"Let's put it this way—I wasn't sure if you knew how to have *fun*." East skimmed his hand across the water, splashing it at King, who took hold of his wrist and pulled him flush to his body then planted a hard kiss to his lips.

"I know how to have fun, little prince. But I also know when to turn it off."

East squirmed in his hold. "Well, you're definitely not turned *off* now."

King chuckled and shoved East in my direction. "You were doing so well there for a moment."

"At being what? An adult? That's right. You want conversation, not sex, for a while." East cocked his head. "Is that a stamina thing?"

"You just felt for yourself it wasn't."

"Okay, fine. Conversation, huh?" East looked at me. "I'm pretty sure we can come up with something. The question is, are you going to answer anything we want to talk about?"

I had to hand it to East—he might come off as a superficial ass on the surface, but there was a layer of intelligence underneath it. He'd been trying to uncover who King was ever since we'd been whisked away here.

"Maybe not *anything*," King said, clearly seeing the direction East was taking him. "But I'm willing to hear you out."

In other words, he'd tell us what he wanted and not a damn thing more.

"Okay, well, at least answer this—how can a professor afford all of this? Do you invest? Stocks? Real estate? Do you have a gambling problem?"

King floated to his back, a relaxed chuckle leaving him. "Would it really be a problem if I could afford a private jet and island?"

East glanced at me, narrowing his eyes. "Look who's deflecting now?"

He was right, of course. But where East avoided conversation with sex, King masterfully redirected your attention to a different question he *was* willing to answer.

"Oh no, not this time, Batman," East continued. "There is absolutely nothing about you online. No business deals, no articles about you, no pictures. The only thing available is your schooling history, which, *boring*, I already knew all that."

King shifted to his feet, water sluicing over his skin in a way that made me want to lick it. “Always digging, aren’t you? Just determined to find something.”

“No shit. You already had my attention with the way you fill out your suits. But the fact I can’t find shit about you online, that my *hacker* can’t find anything… Consider my interest piqued.”

King moved back up to the tanning ledge and lay out in the shallow water. He reached for his sunglasses, but just as he was about to put them on, East swam up beside him and snatched them out of his hand.

“I don’t think so. You said you wanted to talk. So talk.” He slid King’s glasses on and looked at me. “Who wears them better?”

The audacity East possessed was on a whole other level. I’d never act the way he did around King, but the crook to the professor’s lips told me he enjoyed it…to an extent.

“I’m going to say the original owner.”

East flicked a splash of water in my direction. “Eh, you don’t have any fashion sense anyway.”

I shook my head as he turned back to King, who was watching our exchange with an amused glint in his eyes.

“But I want to look in your eyes when you tell me your *true* identity. Please don’t tell me your name is Bruce. I don’t think I could shout that when you’re fucking me.”

“And that’s when you take it too far.” King let out a sigh and plucked his glasses from East’s face. “Always pushing too far.”

“In all fairness, that’s your fault,” I said, shocking the hell out of myself. “The key with East is to stop him talking *before* he gets out of hand. You let him go too long.”

“My mistake. Let’s see if I can rectify that. Have you ever heard of TerraKohr?”

“The mega-conglomerate of luxury establishments and brands all over the world? Gee, no, what’s that?” East said in a droll voice.

When King looked at me, I nodded. “Yeah, my family’s business has contacts with a few of TerraKohr’s restaurants. Why?”

He spread his hands wide. “It’s mine.”

It’s mine. That was all he said. So nonchalant, like he hadn’t just confessed to owning a company that had to be valued in the *hundreds of billions*.

I looked to East to get his reaction, but he just crossed his arms and stared down at King with a disbelieving expression. “Yours,” he said. “Really.”

“You asked.”

“I asked for the truth.” He waved a hand around at all we were surrounded by. “An inheritance, sure. Getting lucky with the stock market, I believe it. The head of TerraKohr moonlighting as a professor at Astor? Bullshit.”

“East—” I started.

“What? Don’t tell me you believe him.”

I opened my mouth to disagree, but I couldn’t. Thinking the professor I’d worked with for years was some secret mega-billionaire made absolutely no sense. “I mean… It *does* sound a little crazy.”

King nodded. “I won’t disagree with that.”

“But you’re still standing by your story?” East said.

“Stand by it? I live it.”

East narrowed his eyes. “TerraKohr owns practically every club I’ve been personally invited to in the city.”

“I know. Onyx. Lure. Kyanite. Among many others.”

“Anyone could Google that.”

King asked me, “Would I know that we’ve offered to buy your family’s company twice over the last five years?”

Wait, how *did* he know that? It wasn’t exactly public information, and something my parents had only discussed privately.

“Gossip gets around,” East said. “Big deal.”

King chuckled as he sat up, and it was hard not to get distracted by all those muscles on full display. “You don’t believe me. You don’t have to. You asked, I answered.”

He seemed completely unbothered by the accusations, but it was only because if it *was* true, I didn’t know what to do with it. King kept blowing my mind at every turn. But even though he’d apparently been keeping massive secrets, it didn’t make him a liar. He was usually blunt to the point of brutality, and that had me thinking maybe all of this *was* real.

“And you keep it private because…?” I asked.

“It’s nobody’s business. The more money one has, the more problems can arise. A professor, however, attracts no attention.”

“Uh, have you seen yourself?” East pointed out. “You don’t exactly look like all the other stodgy Astor professors.”

“Doesn’t matter. It’s still a good—”

“*Cover* for you and your hooded friends? Are they all professors too? Oh my God, if you tell me Livingston was there the night you came on our faces, I might just rethink this whole thing.”

“No, Livingston was not there. I’m the only professor.”

“Do they work for you? These hooded friends,” East said. “Are you their leader? Do you punish them the same way you did me if they step out of line?”

King rose to his feet then, his towering presence even more so now that I knew this enormous secret he’d been keeping. Scratch that—the *two* enormous secrets he’d been keeping.

“I’m done talking about this,” he said, walking over to pick up his towel.

“So that’s a yes?” East asked.

“It’s the moment you realize the conversation is over.” King brushed the towel over his chest and leveled East with a stare that would’ve silenced most men. “I told you, I want everyone to feel comfortable while they’re here. That includes me. Know when to stop, East—that’s also part of being an adult.”

King looked to me, probably to see how I was processing everything he’d just said, but I was too blown away to ask anything else. I needed to think. Something King seemed to understand.

“We’ll talk more later,” he told us, and then disappeared inside.

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TWENTY-SIX

king

I'D SPENT THE rest of the day giving them a tour of the estate and the island, even taking the Bronco down to the banana trees at the south end to pick a few. Both got the hang of using the cane knife easier than I expected from a couple of city boys, even turning it into a competition to see who could collect the most bunches.

I'd wisely kept out of that argument, refusing to choose sides, but I *did* enjoy the fruits of their labor by indulging in the growing piles of fruit in the back of the SUV.

I'd also enjoyed the view of both sporting nothing but shorts riding low on their hips. East's skin was already turning a darker shade of olive after hours in the sun, while Zac's was slightly pinker. The last thing I'd wanted was for him to burn, so keeping him lathered in sunscreen was a must, and I'd taken it upon myself to apply it.

Such a hardship, touching him, running my fingers over the smooth young skin I had no business indulging in. But hearing Zac's breath hitch when my hands were on him… It wasn't just my cock that was affected.

And then there was East—inquisitive beyond belief, but there was something else that was beginning to peek through, the slightest hint of vulnerability, and the way he didn't even notice he unconsciously protected Zac. Definitely pretentious, but in my world, that was a common theme, and it was always an exterior that safeguarded whatever was hiding beneath.

I shouldn't want to crack it right open. I shouldn't want anything more to do with either of them other than fulfilling each other's physical desires.

But I found myself wanting to ask just as many questions of them as they did of me.

Insanity, I thought again, still not believing I'd brought them here in the first place. But there they were, walking back to the Bronco with their arms full of bananas, a task I would've thought was below James Easton.

He grinned as he dropped the bunches on top of the others in the trunk. "Kicked your ass, Fletcher."

"You wish, *Easton*."

East winked and handed me the cane knife. "He can't admit defeat."

"I'd admit it if that was the case," Zac said, dropping his bundle. "Which it was *not*."

East started to reply, but his gaze caught on something and his brow puzzled. "Who the hell is that? Paparazzi?"

I followed his stare to where a boat was pulling into the dock near the main house. "No, that's dinner."

"Really?" East squinted as Chef Ruan and his sous chef unloaded items off the boat. "So are they gonna be laid out buffet style, or…?"

Smirking, I swatted his ass and climbed into the driver's seat. "No, they're the chefs *making* dinner. Did you think I was gonna put you to work chopping and peeling?"

Zac let out a laugh as I started the engine. "I'd put money on him thinking *you* would be cooking."

"How much money are we talkin'?" East said.

"Everything's a bet to you."

"It makes things more interesting, don't you think?"

I caught East's eyes in the mirror. "While they're prepping dinner, how about I take you up on a different kind of bet?"

He perked up at that. "I'm listening."

"How good are you at cornhole?"

"What the hell is cornhole?"

"A game."

"Isn't that the one where you throw a sack in a hole?" Zac said, turning around to grin at East. "You should be good at that."

"If this game includes sacks and holes, I'm in."

"Yeah," I said. "I figured you would be."

I pulled up to the front of the main house, and when we got out of the vehicle and Zac headed around to the trunk, I shook my head.

“Chef will get them. Let’s head down to the cabana.” I eyed East over the hood. “We’ll have a game and a few drinks while they get dinner ready.”

“A game of *cornhole*?”

“Don’t tell me you’re scared I’ll beat you.”

“Hell no. But I do want it noted that you have had *many* more years to practice throwing sacks in holes than we have.”

I laughed despite myself. “Duly noted.”

We followed the winding path that led from the main house through the lush grounds, to one of the handful of cabanas scattered around the island. This one was equipped with a grill, a fully stocked bar and fridge, loungers, and beach games. Including cornhole boards.

“Okay, East, you’re on bar duty. Zac, we’ll get the game set up.”

“Wait a second.” East held a hand up. “You want me to make and serve you both a drink? Don’t you have someone to do that?”

“Private island, remember? No service here unless you do it yourself. You do know how to make a drink, I assume.”

“Well, of course, but—”

“Then the bar’s over there. You’ll find everything you need. Zac, what would you like?”

Zac smiled, and I had a feeling he was thinking of something that required a little more than a quick pour. “I’ll take a Tequila Sunrise, thanks.”

“Good choice. And I’ll take a Painkiller. Be sure to be generous with the rum.”

East rolled his eyes and turned toward the bar, mumbling, “Want me to hold it while you drink it too?”

I gestured for Zac to follow me to the weatherproof trunk and then unlatched it. “Two cornhole boards.”

Zac chuckled as I took out the first one and he grabbed the second. The sand was warm beneath our feet as we made our way out from under the shade of the cabana.

“Why do you have games for two or more if you come here on your own to relax?”

I placed the first board down and glanced over my shoulder at him. “Who said I always come here alone?”

Zac opened his mouth, no doubt about to apologize for prying, but I held up a hand.

"Sorry," I said, shocking him. "That was me deflecting again, wasn't it?"

"I mean, I wasn't going to say…"

"Why not?" I said, taking the second board from him. "I told you that I'm not your professor out here and to ask whatever you want, and you did. So let's try that again."

"Okay, why do you have games for two or more?"

"Because there was a time where someone other than me used to come here to help me unwind."

"But…not anymore?"

"But not anymore." I stepped around him to put the second board in place—approximately twenty-seven feet away.

I wasn't sure why I'd told Zac what I had. Maybe it was because I knew a whole lot more about them than they did me, and while that was necessary for many reasons, that particular piece of information seemed more personal than private.

"Your drinks are ready!" East called out from where he stood under the cabana with what looked like an espresso martini. "But alas, no tray to serve them to you on, your highness."

That mouth of his…

Zac dropped the container with the small bags at East's feet as he went to grab his drink, and I shut the trunk.

"So this cornhole game." East frowned at the boards on the sand. "Seriously, they couldn't come up with a better name?"

"What about the game?" I said before taking a sip of my Painkiller. East *definitely* hadn't gone light on the rum.

"How do you play?"

"We're going to go with basic rules today without counting points. Two play at a time. One person at each end. We take turns throwing the bags, and whoever gets the most bags in the hole wins."

East scrunched his nose up. "That's it? Seems easy enough."

"I'd agree, except for the amount of alcohol you added to this drink."

"Mine too," Zac said, eyeing East's martini. "Did you even add any to yours, or are you trying to get us drunk so you have a better chance at winning?"

“Are you accusing me of cheating?”

Zac nodded. “Yes.”

“If you wanted your drink a certain way, then you should’ve made it yourself. That goes for you too,” East said to me. “You’re the one who said to not go easy on the rum. Now, back to the game—what are we playing for, clothes?”

Zac scoffed and shook his head. “How about something even more valuable?”

I eyed my TA, who was grinning at me and East over the lip of his straw. “Information,” he said.

So that little Q&A back there had emboldened him. Well, it wasn’t like they’d have a chance once we got going. They hadn’t even played this game before.

“Fuck yes.” East pointed at Zac. “Information. You’re thinking like me.”

“God, I hope not,” Zac said, and had to jump out of the way as East scooped up a bag to throw at him. “I’ll take you on first before the tequila fucks up my aim.”

“Wait, are you saying tequila will affect your ability to get it in the hole?” East hopped up on top of the bar and let out a laugh. “That doesn’t bode well for the rest of the night.”

Zac flipped him off as I took up residence at the other board and tossed a bag in the air. “I believe I’m the only one who really needs to be able to get it in the hole,” I said.

An exaggerated gasp escaped East as he put a hand over his chest. “Professor Kingston’s got a filthy mouth. I approve.”

A smile tipped up Zac’s lips as stood behind what I’d designated as the foul line in the sand. “So for every sack in the hole, whoever makes it gets to ask a question, no holds barred?”

Look at Zac taking up the inquisitive mantle. I wonder what it is he’s dying to know…

Considering I’d brought them both to my island and extended an invitation, there really wasn’t any reason *not* to answer their questions. It wasn’t like I had any dark secrets. I wasn’t actually Batman.

“Deal,” I said before aiming for Zac’s board and tossing the bag. It hit the platform and skidded to the edge of the hole before slowly tipping in.

“Uh oh.” East gave Zac a warning look and sipped on his martini.

I reached down for another bag and pondered what I wanted to ask first. “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

“Opening up a second location of The Cellar under my management,” Zac answered.

“You’re already running one?”

He grinned. “I already answered your question, King. It’s my turn.” He aimed and threw, but tossed it more like a baseball and overshot the board completely.

“Oh God, this is gonna be a landslide,” East muttered.

“Try it underhand. Like this.” I pitched another bag at the board and got lucky again as it popped into the hole. “What’s your *current* role at the company?”

Zac ran his fingers through his windblown hair and automatically went to push his glasses up but then realized he’d switched them out for contacts today. “I’m running the restaurants with my father, so once I graduate I’ll have the knowledge to open a new location in the city, on my own.”

I let out a low whistle. “Impressive.”

“Wait, wait, wait.” East hopped off the bar. “What are you talking about, you’ll open another Cellar? How’d you get that job?”

“My family owns it.”

“What?” East’s eyes widened. “You never told me that.”

“You never asked.”

East sputtered, his hands low on his hips, unable to refute Zac’s statement.

I shook my head. “For such a nosy little shit, I’m shocked you didn’t know Zac is part of the Fletcher family’s business. I thought you had your finger on the pulse of all of Manhattan’s high-end establishments. The Cellar locations extend far beyond that.”

All he could manage was a few curses while he tried to process this new information. “Look, talking hasn’t been our strong point.”

“You never bothered to ask what Zac’s doing after graduation?”

“I’m asking now.”

Zac grabbed a bag from the sand. “You want to ask questions, you have to get a sack in the hole. But it’s my turn.” He used an underhand throw this time, managing to land on the top of the board before it fell in. Zac let out a loud whoop and said, “All right, King, I have to know: why did you become

a professor in the first place? If you've got all this, why waste time with delinquents like East?"

"I take offense to that," East said.

"I meant you to. Well?"

"It was kind of by…accident, I guess you could say," I replied.

"Accident?" East scoffed. "How do you *accidentally* end up with one of the most boring jobs on the planet?"

"I'm so glad you hold me in such high esteem."

"Oh, I do. But not because of your job. In fact, it never made sense to me that someone like you was *just* a professor. Sorry, but you don't fit the mold. You're too fucking hot."

"Well, for your information, I enjoy being a professor, but you're right—it's not what I set out to do. I started up TerraKohr before I graduated, and that was my sole focus until a few years ago. My favorite professor at Astor, my mentor, was forced to retire unexpectedly, and I stepped in temporarily to take his place."

"Okay." Zac nodded, twisting one of the bags in his hands. "But that doesn't explain why you stayed."

"No, it doesn't, does it?" I reached for my drink and took a long sip, letting the alcohol warm a path down my throat. "You see, I was going to leave a little earlier and continue to pursue my other business ventures, but then…you came along."

Zac's eyes widened to the size of saucers.

"Wait, you stayed for *Zac*?" East asked.

I could tell from the stunned look on Zac's face that he wanted to know the exact same thing, and while that technically would count as two questions, I didn't have the heart to make them wait.

"I stayed because I saw Zac's potential." I put my drink down and went to pick up another bag. "We worked well together, and I knew I could help you."

Zac licked his lips, completely and utterly blindsided by my response. "Wow, I…I had no idea."

"I know. There was no reason for you to. You're going to go a long way in life, Zac. I just wanted to help you get there."

East made a gagging sound. "Sorry, but would you two like a moment?"

"Oh, shut it," Zac said, and threw a bag at the imp sitting on the bar. "Do you not have one sensitive bone in your body?"

East spread his legs, and I shook my head. “Doesn’t count.”

“Well, it should. Anyway, I didn’t come here for hearts and flowers conversation.” East hopped off the bar and sauntered over to Zac. “So if that’s all you’ve got, move out of the way and let me have a turn. It’s time to get some *actual* dirt on King.”

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TWENTY-SEVEN

zac

WE DIDN'T GET shit from King. East's aim was even worse than mine, never even landing a sack in the hole—which I planned to give him hell about for the foreseeable future—so that meant King had been the one asking all the questions.

But today was a new day. There was plenty of time to find out more about our mysterious professor turned billionaire. Or was it billionaire turned professor? Billionaire *and* professor?

Who are you, really? I thought as I watched him standing thigh-deep in the ocean with East. They'd spent the better part of the morning bodysurfing, only after I insisted I was happy to go for a run before grabbing a book from King's collection and laying out on a beach towel.

Not that I'd gotten any reading done. How could I with that view?

King pointed out a new set of waves, and East nodded as he turned his back on it and waited.

Bodysurfing was an entirely new concept to me. I didn't even know you could surf without a board, but watching them both swim out and catch waves with their incredible bodies was my new favorite sport.

To watch, anyway. No way in hell would you catch me setting foot in there.

East swung his arms in front of him as he launched himself into the wave, keeping his lean body straight as he glided across like he'd been doing it his whole life. Apparently he'd tried it before, but with King's instruction, he looked like a pro. They were both insane. Sexy, but insane.

I let out a piercing whistle as East popped out of the water near where King was clapping. He heard me and grinned before standing and brushing his hair back off his face. King approached, the two of them falling into an animated conversation that was so interesting to watch. They'd never had a friendly type of relationship, so seeing them together and watching the easy way they got along over a common interest had me wondering how long this would all last.

One week only, right? Just sex and a good time. King was definitely fulfilling his end of the bargain there. He'd never promised answers about his private life, but the small glimpses we'd gotten had me dying to know more.

His words from yesterday still echoed through my mind.

I stayed because I saw Zac's potential…

A surge of emotion ran through me yet again, because holy shit. He'd held me in such high esteem that he rearranged his life…to help *me*? I couldn't comprehend that. No one had ever done anything like that for me, and King had never even mentioned it. I'd known nothing about his real life, but he was trying to help me make my way in mine?

East jogged out of the water, catching my attention as his swim trunks rode low on his hips. His skin glistened under the sun as he walked my way, his long strides not at all deterred by the mounds of sand between us.

Okay, he's fuckin' hot. Ridiculously so.

"Now this is one hell of a sexy personal cheering section," he said, standing over me.

"Don't do it," I warned.

He gave me an innocent look. "Do what?"

Before I could move, he leaned down and ran his fingers through his hair, shaking the water onto my heated skin.

I tried to dodge the droplets, but it was no use. The cool water hit my sun-kissed skin and actually felt nice. Not that I was about to tell *him* that.

"Looked like you needed cooling off," East said as he grabbed up a towel and dried himself off. "Not that I could blame you. Who wouldn't watching us out there?"

"Feeling yourself a little bit, are you?"

"You're the one who couldn't tear your eyes off me."

I had no comeback for that because he was right. I'd been practically drooling over the two of them. Why should I hide it? "You *and* King."

“Well, yeah, that guy’s body should be on magazine covers—and I am *not* talking about *Men’s Health*. Although he’d probably sell a shit-ton of those.”

He spread his towel out beside mine and lay back so he was propped up on his arms. Just as he got settled, King stretched his arms out in front of himself in a perfect arc and caught a rolling wave nearly all the way to shore.

“Fucking hell. Look at his form,” East said.

“Yeah, he’s really good.”

“I’m not talking about his *style*. Those arms? The power there is insane, and—” East’s words fell off as King got to his feet and looked up the beach at us, water running down that sculpted chest to where it was lapping around his thick thighs. Then he wiped a hand over his face and turned back to the incoming waves. “How is that man single?”

“Luck,” I said. “He hasn’t always been.”

“Single?”

“Hmm?” I turned to see East looking over his sunglasses at me.

“You said he hasn’t always been. I’m assuming you mean single. How do you know that? There’s no mention anywhere about him and a significant other—I looked before we decided to make a play.”

My lips twitched as I remembered the colossal failure of our “play.”

“He told me yesterday.”

“When? He never lost a throw after that one with you.”

“It was before that, when we were setting up. He didn’t say much, just that he used to come down here with someone.”

East huffed and turned back to watch the man wading out in the blue depths. “I don’t want to think about that.”

I glanced over to see his jaw was a little tighter than it had been minutes ago when he’d been giving me a cool down.

If I didn’t know better I might just think— “You’re jealous.”

“How many times do I have to tell you?” East said, his eyes still forward. “I don’t *get* jealous.”

“Riiight—you just don’t want to think about King here having sex with someone else.”

“Do you?”

“No, but I’m not you. Usually you’d be telling me you were sorry to miss that.”

“Well, I am. Sorry to have not been invited.”

While that sounded plausible enough and very *East*, the tic in his jaw remained.

“Uh huh, well, it’s over now—obviously.”

“Why obviously?”

“Because he’s here with us.”

“Oh, Zac.” East cocked his head. “Have you always been this naïve? Or is this a new development?”

“I’m not naïve. I just don’t think King is like that.” My eyes drifted back to the man under discussion.

“Maybe he didn’t want to be part of King’s secret underground doings,” East speculated. “I don’t know why, though. Who’d be dumb enough to turn down the opportunity for power and unbelievable wealth?”

“Maybe he had questions that never got answered,” I pointed out. “You have to admit, the whole thing is a little—”

“Mysterious? Intriguing? Sexy?”

“All of those things, yes, but it’s also asking for a lot of trust.”

“And you don’t *trust* your professor?”

“Well, he’s not just my professor now, is he?”

As King walked out of the sea, East shrugged. “I suppose so, but do you really think he’d put you in harm’s way after sticking around to watch over you for all these years? Speaking of, how are you going to be able to be anywhere near him when we get back to school without imagining him looking like *that*?”

It was a valid question, one I’d been asking myself every single day since we were blindfolded and taken into the mystery building. I had no goddamn idea how I was going to get through the last couple of months at Astor.

“With great difficulty.”

“I’m just glad I don’t have any classes with him.” East licked his lips, no doubt imagining running them all over King. “Then again, I wouldn’t mind looking at him and remembering this very moment right now. Or when he took you on the table, and me over the top of you.”

And there went my dick, standing and ready to greet King as he arrived.

“What are you two scheming about?”

East reached for a towel and tossed it to him, and we watched with heated interest as he dried off his built body. “Aww, don’t you hate when

you ask a question and don’t get an answer?” East lay back, placing his hands under his head, and I just shrugged.

East was right. We’d been giving over a lot of information these past few days, and I was positive King knew even more. It wouldn’t hurt for him to be in the dark on this. It wasn’t like we could hide the reaction our bodies had just looking at his.

And that was enough.

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TWENTY-EIGHT

east

I HAD TO admit, King was a consummate host. I hadn't lacked for anything on this trip, down to the fresh seafood towers his chef prepared and the luxury toiletries that were somehow personalized to my tastes in my en suite.

Take that, West, with your shitty Hamptons accommodations.

Okay, maybe the Hamptons weren't exactly low class, but a trip with the dean certainly was.

And none of that beat out a private island with King.

"You two up for a midnight stroll?" In a pair of loose cream linen pants and a matching top, King looked entirely at ease here in a way he never did in the city. There he was all tailored suits—fashionable, but uptight. Here he rarely even wore clothes, something I was a fan of. Even as hot as he looked right then, he was still wearing far too much.

"Definitely," Zac said, setting his drink aside and getting to his feet.

"You're both wearing too much for a naked stroll on the beach." I pulled my shirt up over my head and tossed it across a chair before joining them out on the patio.

"He didn't say a naked stroll, but figures that's where your mind went," Zac said.

"Can you blame me? This should be a no-clothes-allowed week."

"I try to avoid putting my staff in uncomfortable situations when they're here," King said, but then reached for the neck of his shirt and pulled it off. "But since they're gone for the night…"

Hell yes, I thought as all that delicious skin came into view. “Much better. You’re seriously fucking hot, you know that?”

“I do.” King shot me a wink. All that confidence was well earned, and I appreciated the fact that he knew how sexy he was. He would have to be an idiot not to, and King was no fool. Only one of the many reasons I was attracted to him.

Zac took one look at the both of us and, to my satisfaction, got rid of his shirt as well before we all headed down toward the beach.

“Is it still considered a midnight stroll if it’s eleven p.m.?” I said.

Zac snorted and shook his head. “So literal. I think he meant—” His words cut off at the long line of tiki torches illuminating a path toward the beach.

Wait, no, not toward the beach itself, but to a huge blanket setup with pillows along the shore.

“Wow,” Zac said softly. “This is—”

“A little too romantic for what I had in mind,” I said, looking at the two beside me. “I’m all for a naked stroll and maybe a frolic in the sea, but a midnight picnic under the stars?”

The idea sent a shiver up my spine, but where I’d usually find myself wanting to gag, my heart beat a little faster.

“Relax,” King said. “I don’t expect you to sit here and point out the constellations with me.”

I swallowed and glanced back at the setup. “That’s what it looks like to me.”

“Then you’re looking at it all wrong. I don’t want to search for the stars with you.” King leaned over and put his lips by my ear. “I’m gonna make you see them.”

He nipped at my lobe, and electricity shot straight to my cock, then he turned to Zac.

“He wanted a naked midnight stroll. Who am I to deny that? Strip him.”

King walked off, leaving us staring after him, until Zac turned and reached for the drawstring of my shorts.

“You know, he’s really getting off on this whole shock and order schtick he’s got going on,” I mused as Zac slipped his fingers inside my shorts and shoved them down.

“And you’re not?” He eyed my erection as I stepped out of my clothing and reached for his.

“Well, of course I am, it’s sexy as fuck, but don’t you think it’s time we had a little fun with him?”

“Meaning…?”

“Meaning we drive *him* a little crazy?”

Zac glanced over to where King had settled down on the blanket, legs stretched out, hands up behind him on the pillow. “What’d you have in mind?”

“I think it’s time we seduced Professor Kingston.”

Zac wrapped a hand around the root of his cock and squeezed. Oh yeah, he was all about that.

“Follow my lead.” I winked then headed toward where our delectable host waited for us.

We moved to the end of the blanket so King could get a good look at us. I wanted him salivating by the time he finally got what he wanted tonight, and the best way to do that was to give him a show. After all, that’s what had initially tipped his hand, watching Zac fuck me down in that throne room. King hadn’t been able to get it out of his head, and now here we were.

His eyes roved over us. The light from the torches washed over our sun-kissed skin, making it glow, and as his heated gaze traveled down to our hard cocks, he licked his lips.

“Incredible,” King said, reaching down to his stiffening cock. “Your bodies are incredible.”

“We know,” I replied with the same arrogance he’d shown on our way down here. “But why don’t you take out that big cock of yours and show us *how* incredible you think they are?”

King arched a brow, and for a second I thought he might just shut me down—until he pulled the drawstring free and released his thick dick.

Zac sucked in a breath, and I turned to grab the back of his neck and haul him in for a crushing kiss. Zac’s lips parted the second they met mine, his tongue slipping inside to tangle as my hands went to his waist to haul him in closer. He grabbed my ass as our cocks rubbed against each other.

King groaned watching us, wrapping his fingers around his erection as Zac ripped his mouth from mine and kissed a path down my neck. God I

loved it. King's eyes on us. The way Zac knew how to touch me in a way that set my body on fire.

"Get down here," King said roughly. He stroked himself leisurely, but every muscle in his body was tensed, betraying his impatience.

"Now, now, *King*. You've been so busy being such a *very* good host…"

Zac nodded in agreement. "So why don't you lie there and let us take *very* good care of you tonight?"

We both dropped down to our knees, each straddling one of King's legs, as our professor lifted his eyebrows. But he didn't say a word to stop us. He licked his lips, looking incredibly turned on as he, surprisingly, kept his hands to himself.

Zac winked at me as he flattened his palm on King's thigh and began to run his hand up his leg.

Hell yes. I was so here for that hot, assertive side of Zac that I let him take the lead. He rose back up on his knees as he moved his hand farther up King's body, bypassing his cock and running it up his side and chest. Then he leaned down, capturing King's mouth in a kiss while he pinned his arms up over his head.

"No touching," Zac said. That demand as he lowered back down had King's cock jumping, but he did as he was told and kept his arms where they were.

That glistening tip was too much temptation for Zac to ignore, though, and his tongue came out to lick the bead of pre-cum. He hummed low in his throat before diving back in for another taste. Full lips slid down King's stiff prick, Zac swallowing him as far as he could take him. The sight had me reaching for my own erection that was currently making a mess of the leg I straddled.

Zac pumped him a few more times, and I was ready for my turn. I leaned over, and when he felt me there, he rose off King's cock, and I dove in without missing a beat. A curse escaped the sex god beneath our thighs as I took his huge dick down my throat.

"We can't get enough of you." Zac didn't take his hand off King, reaching down to massage his balls as I sucked him off.

King looked down at us with a heady stare. Eyes glazing over. Body tensing. Chest rising and falling with rapid breaths. It was hard to imagine this was the same man I'd seen in the classroom last week, so serious and demanding.

He certainly wasn’t in any place to demand anything right now.

“Jesus Christ.” King arched his head back as I tongued the wet slit of his dick, and then Zac took over, sucking on the head like it was the best thing he’d ever had in his mouth.

Besides my own, obviously.

I licked up the hard V of King’s body, wanting to trail my lips over every taut contour of his abs and kiss every inch of flesh. The way his hands clenched into the pillow told me he was struggling with not being able to touch or guide us, and I smirked with satisfaction as I brushed my mouth over his.

“Want to see why we’re so ravenous?” I said. “See how fucking good you taste…”

I parted his lips with my tongue, then licked into his mouth. He moaned, the sensation vibrating through me before he angled his head in an effort to get even more. Damn, his kiss was as eager as his body that was currently straining under mine as Zac continued to blow his cock—and his mind.

“You wanted us to see stars, huh? How about you show us how it’s done first?” I sucked at the tender skin beneath his neck before drawing off him, tagging off with Zac to get my lips around his massive dick again. It was so big I had to wrap my hand around the base of him to make sure every inch was included in this sensory takeover.

Zac took his fill of King’s mouth, then kissed his way down his body, joining me as I drew up off King so we could both lick at him at the same time. I kept my hand on his base, continuously pumping while we took turns lapping up his arousal. I didn’t think either Zac or I noticed that we were grinding over his body like a couple of horny teenagers, getting ourselves off on his thighs with the erotic sounds he made spurring us on.

“Shit.” King’s hips bucked up under our assault. His balls drew up tight, his cock hot, hard steel, and I knew if I wanted him to come down my throat, I had to act fast.

“Sorry, not sorry,” I said to Zac as I nudged him out of the way to wrap my lips around King. I was a selfish bastard, and I wanted that explosion we’d stroked him to. If Zac minded, I couldn’t tell, his hand working his own dick at the same fast pace my mouth was as his gaze flipped from me to King and back.

I could feel my own release hovering, and it wouldn’t take much to send me over the edge.

It was Zac’s orgasm shooting out across King’s abs that did it. King’s whole body tensed. He came on a roar, his dick pulsing hot jets of cum down my throat. It was so much and so intense that it trickled down the sides of my mouth, making me unable to hold back my own. I kept swallowing him down as my release erupted beneath me, sandwiched between my body and King’s leg that had served as a source of friction to get me off.

Hell, what was I saying? Just looking at him and Zac getting it on had my dick hard, so it wasn’t a reach that seeing them come would cause a chain reaction.

“Fucking unreal.”

The comedown from my orgasm had the blood ringing in my ears so loud I almost missed King’s words, but I felt a supreme sense of pleasure at the fact he couldn’t say much more than that at the moment.

The next time he saw the stars, he’d definitely think of us.

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TWENTY-NINE

king

IT WAS OFFICIAL. I'd lost control of this night. And as I lay there under the starlit sky, I realized the two smirking down at me with shiny, wet lips had stolen it right out from under me.

Greedy, greedy boys…

Somewhere between East and Zac making out, and then using those hungry mouths to drive me crazy, they'd done the impossible—made me forget who was in control. Something they seemed particularly pleased with as Zac lazily stroked his spent cock and East wiped my cum off the corner of his lip. But if they thought things were about to end there, they'd forgotten who they were dealing with.

That was just the appetizer. *They* were the main course, and it was time to remind them of who was in charge on this island.

I grabbed hold of East's wrist and dragged him down on top of me. "Proud of yourself?" I asked as I brought his thumb to my mouth and nipped at it.

"Yeah, I am. You come like a fucking beast. Makes me hard as hell."

He wasn't lying. The two of them had come as hard as I had just now, but youth and a healthy dose of lust had their cocks standing up to meet mine.

I looked over East's shoulder to Zac, who was watching us, his eyes hooded with arousal, and an idea took root. One that had been offered to me at a time and place I was unable to accept.

But here and now was a *very* different scenario.

“You once told me you’d show me what a greedy bottom my TA is for you… Do it now.”

East gave an immoral smirk as he glanced over his shoulder at Zac.

“Bend him over me instead of the desk.”

Zac sucked in a harsh breath, clamping his hand tight around his shaft as East moved off me and I spread my legs wide, showing off my freshly erect cock.

It was insane how ready to go I was again but I wasn’t about to question it, not when I had these two gorgeous men raring and willing to go.

East got to his feet and sauntered to the end of the blanket to where a picnic basket of supplies had been provided, and I gestured for Zac to move between my thighs. He did so without a word, licking along his lip that was swollen from sucking me, and fuck, he’d never looked sexier.

“Bring that teasing tongue down here,” I said, and Zac lowered over me, bracing his hands on my chest. Then he traced the tip of his tongue along my lower one, eliciting a rumbling growl from deep within me. His smile against my mouth told me he liked that, a whole fucking lot. “Bold tonight, aren’t we?” I whispered, and smoothed my hands down his warm skin to his ass. “East rubbing off on you?”

Zac rolled over me, aligning our cocks in a delicious rub that would be forbidden under normal circumstances. “I don’t feel East anywhere right now, do you?”

“No.” I grunted, digging my fingers into the soft, round globes of his ass. “But you’re about to, real soon.”

Zac tipped his head back and rocked a little faster over me as East walked back, a bottle of lube in hand.

“Speak of the devil…” I said, craning up to bite at Zac’s chin. “East is going to help me get you ready. Get up on your knees—open yourself up for him.”

Zac groaned and lowered his forehead to my chest, but did as he was told, moving to his knees as I held his delectable ass wide.

“Fuck.” East’s eyes zeroed in on the hole now spread open to him, and he uncapped the bottle. “Your ass has never looked better than with your professor holding it open for me.”

“Little prince…” I warned.

“What? It’s true. Your skin against his is fucking perfection. I wish I could see your dueling dicks.”

“For fuck’s sake, East,” Zac growled, and pushed himself back. “Should’ve muzzled you.”

“Maybe,” the smartass said, and sank to his knees. “But then I couldn’t do this.”

East ducked his head, and the next thing I felt was his tongue snaking a wet path up the channel I was holding wide, stopping here and there to tease at my fingers.

Zac cursed and buried his face in the crook of my neck as his hips rocked a little faster, then East poured a generous amount of lube down the crack of his ass and added his fingers to the mix. He stroked, stretched and teased Zac until his dick was dripping pre-cum all over mine.

East, it turned out, was a menace in every fucking way. Even when it came to topping his horny friend.

“Enough, *James*,” I gritted out when my dick threatened an early release. “Get in him or I will.”

East looked at me over Zac’s shoulder and shook his head. “Not this time, Big Poppa.”

Damn if his barbs didn’t make my cock ache even more as he put his lips to Zac’s tailbone and dragged his tongue up his back, his eyes locking with mine. East wasn’t intimidated by me at all, and that was as frustrating as it was sexy—not that I’d ever let him know that.

“This greedy bottom is mine tonight.” East slapped Zac’s ass and straightened up on his knees, gripping his dick. “You just hold him open for me.”

His eyes glittered as bright as the stars twinkling overhead as he lined himself up with Zac’s body and slowly sank inside. The pleasure-filled moan that vibrated through Zac as his body surged over the top of mine had me gripping his hips to keep him in place.

“I want to see you,” I told him, wanting to watch his eyes glaze over when East made him fly. “Brace your hands by my head and look down at me.”

Zac pushed up, kneeling over me, and when East shoved inside him this time, Zac’s eyes practically rolled to the back of his head.

“Again, James,” I ordered East, finding Zac’s cock and wrapping it in my fist to give it a good pull.

“Oh fuck,” Zac said.

“Take him again,” I barked out, and East slammed home a second time. “That’s it,” I said, watching Zac closely as his lips parted on each hard thrust and his cock pulsed.

He really was a greedy bottom. His dick never softened.

“You like it hard, don’t you? You like letting go…”

Zac bit into his lower lip, the look of ecstasy blurring his eyes telling me all I needed to know. East gave Zac exactly what he wanted, and that was why the two of them worked. He needed someone to deliver the kind of hard, fast fuck East was giving, and be arrogant enough to make sure he was good at it. And as East’s hips began an unrelenting pace behind Zac, it was obvious they’d perfected this act.

“I know you can come with a cock in you—you proved that with me the first night here.” I looked to East. “Take him the way you wanted to that day in my office.”

“Fuck.” East jammed his hips forward, penetrating Zac in one rough slide. “You better be close.”

My eyes cut back to Zac’s hooded ones. “He’s close.”

I arched my hips up so I could circle both of our shafts in my hand, and a rush of air left the man between us.

“That’s it,” I urged as Zac shoved his dick through my fist and East followed with the forward movement. The two of them seemed to sync up and find a matching pace that showed just how in tune they were with each other.

It was a beautiful thing to watch, a memory I knew I’d be recalling for a long time after tonight, as the flickering of the torches cast shadows over the three of us. The tangle of hands, legs, and sweat-slicked bodies mixed with the smell of salt, flowers, and sex to create a feast for the senses that played along to the soundtrack of crashing waves and heavy breathing.

Perfection…

It wasn’t a word I would’ve ever thought to put in the same sentence as the three of us, but that’s how it felt in that moment.

Sheer, utter perfection.

“King,” Zac moaned as he shoved back, his arms trembling. “East…”

“Right fucking here,” East answered, digging his fingers into Zac’s hips.

“I need—”

“I know,” East answered. “I got you.”

Zac’s eyes held mine. “I want you to come with me.”

“Issuing orders now?”

“Wants…” Zac panted as I gave us a long, strong stroke. “I love feeling you pulse against me… I want to feel you explode all over me.”

“Dirty Zac.” I brushed my thumb over the head of his dick, making him shudder. “Who knew?”

“Me,” East said, picking up his pace, his cock now knocking Zac’s prostate, rendering him completely speechless. “*I* fucking knew.”

“Then show me how you get him there.”

East smoothed a hand up to Zac’s shoulder and gripped it tight, then began to hammer into him like he’d never get a chance to again. Zac reveled in every rough thrust, every bite of East’s nails into his hips, and every strong pull I gave to his cock.

His body was being used in the most delicious way possible, and he was loving every fucking minute of it. So much so that when he started to tremble, his arms gave out, and he collapsed onto me, trapping my stroking hand. That didn’t stop East, though—he continued his sensual assault, and seconds later Zac stiffened. His dick pounded in time with mine, and as he buried his face in my neck and cried out, East railed into him one last time.

My shout matched East’s as our climaxes hit, and as he threw his head back in unbridled ecstasy, Zac’s warm, sticky cum coated my hand and stomach, to mix with mine.

The night hadn’t gone to plan at all. I thought I’d be in control, but I was wrong.

But as the two stunning men I’d shared it with collapsed onto the blanket beside me, I couldn’t help but think that in this case, I didn’t mind being wrong—not one little bit.

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THIRTY

east

I CAN'T STAND *the rain.*

It's so inconvenient.

It messes with my clothes, my hair, and most importantly, my good time.

Here I was on a private island with two of the most gorgeous men alive with only a handful of days left to enjoy it, and what had it done for the last however many hours? *Rained*. And not a little sprinkle here and there, but the loud, thunder-clapping, wake-you-up, pouring-down kind of rain.

I stretched my arms above my head, narrowing my eyes as they followed the fat droplets of rain sliding down the glass pane.

Jesus, was it *ever* going to stop? It had started sometime early this morning and hadn't let up.

With a sigh, I grabbed the plush robe from my en suite and slipped it on. The soft material felt good on my naked skin, and I figured there was no point in actually putting anything else on right now. It wasn't like we were going anywhere.

I splashed some water over my face and stared at my reflection, noticing the way my skin had turned a warm olive under the island sun. I looked *good*. Real good. Relaxed, satisfied, and sun-kissed. I still had a few faint tan lines that I was hoping to be rid of by the end of this trip, but that would be dependent on whether or not this monsoon decided to let up anytime soon.

My stomach growled as I ran a hand through my hair, and I decided it might be important to eat if I wanted to pass the next however many rain-filled hours doing something—or someone. Had to refuel the body.

I walked out of my room, not knowing if Zac or King were awake, but as I headed toward the stocked kitchen, I heard someone clear their throat from the corner of the main room.

My feet froze in place, and I turned to see King lounging back in a recliner, dressed in a pair of black silk lounge pants and a robe that hung open, revealing his built chest. He'd opened up the floor-to-ceiling doors that joined the inside and out, and with the balcony protected by a wide awning, all that drifted inside was the cool air and fresh scent of rain.

"Storm rolled in early this morning." King's voice vibrated through the room like the thunder outside. "Did it wake you?"

"Well, it didn't exactly lull me to sleep, that's for sure."

"Huh, I've always found it soothing," he said, watching as the wind picked up and whipped through the greenery outside. "It's one of the reasons I designed the place as I did. So I can open up all the doors and really enjoy it. Become one with the elements."

Was he insane? "And the hurricanes? I suppose you enjoy those too?"

King smirked. "Obviously not. We take precautions for those. But this kind of weather? The wicked, rumbly kind? I love it."

"Maybe for five minutes. When I'm somewhere safe like—"

"A high-rise building in Manhattan? Hardly the safest place in a storm. Plus, sometimes you don't even know it's raining in one of those when you're up *above* the clouds."

"Exactly. I'd be oblivious to anything dire happening. But this? I've been sending up prayers all night."

"Funny, I wouldn't have pegged you as the religious type."

"Not religious, per se, but I am business minded. So I made a deal with the big guy upstairs. I'll confess my sins in the final hours of my life, *if* he can prove he's up there."

"And if he doesn't?"

"Then I won't be around to know it, will I?"

"I can't fault your logic there."

A loud crack of thunder ripped through the sky, making me jump, and King chuckled.

"Sure you don't want to start confessing?"

"Just tell me this is going to be over soon."

"Sorry, no can do. Forecast says it won't let up until tomorrow morning sometime."

You have got *to be kidding me…*

What the hell were we going to do cooped up in here for the next twenty-four hours? There was no cable, no internet—we'd already established *that* ridiculous fact—and now we were stuck inside with no foreseeable escape?

This was not good. *And* I was getting hangry.

I marched into the kitchen and yanked open the fridge a little harder than necessary, and when the condiments clattered on the shelf, I cursed.

"You need some help in there?" King called out as I scanned the contents in front of me. What I was looking for was anyone's guess. I didn't know how to cook. I knew how to order room service.

"I need a menu, a phone, and a restaurant to order from. You got any of those on hand?"

"No." King startled me with how quietly he'd moved into the kitchen behind me. He was super stealthy for someone so imposing. "But I have two of these." He held up his hands and took my place in front of the fridge, perusing the contents inside. "What do you feel like? Eggs? Pancakes? Bacon? All of the above?"

Now this was more like it. I took a spot on one of the island stools and went back to doing what I did best—being waited on by a sexy man. "What kind of eggs?"

King looked back at me, a brow arched. "Nothing *too* fancy."

"Poached?"

"How about scrambled?"

"Anyone can make scrambled."

"Then what are you doing sitting over there?"

"Scrambled is fine, and so is toast. I don't want you spending all day in the kitchen. Not when I can think of better things you could be doing for me."

King snorted and took out a carton of eggs. "Anyone ever tell you you're pretentious as hell?"

"Daily. Sound familiar, Mr. Hardass?"

"Yes. But personality is born out of necessity. Leadership requires a strict hand. Especially with the kind of men I surround myself with."

That sounded as dirty as it did intriguing, and since he clearly wasn't referring to Astor, he must've meant his hooded friends.

Were they part of a sex cult after all?

I was just about to ask when Zac walked into the main room in a pair of shorts and a polo shirt, his hair perfectly styled back from his face. His glasses were perched high on his nose, and under his arm was a stack of… *school* books.

What the hell?

"In case you missed the memo"—I swiveled on my barstool and leaned back against the island—"it's spring break. No work allowed."

"With the rain, I just figured it'd be a good time to catch up on some things."

"It's the perfect day for that," King said as he put several items on the kitchen island. "As long as you don't need the internet."

"I don't." Zac smiled. "It's just a research paper I'm working on. I thought I'd get a few notes down."

My jaw practically hit the floor. Was he kidding with that shit? "You brought homework on a sex trip with *King*?"

Zac shrugged, as I tried to understand how someone as hot as him was so damn nerdy. "Well, he *is* my professor."

King's deep laugh had me turning to him. "Oh, you think that's funny? Don't think for a second I'm going to do anything scholastic on this trip."

"You did Zac last night." King winked at me, and my cock jerked under my robe. "That's scholastic enough for me."

It was still one hell of a mind fuck to know that our tough-as-nails professor had such a dirty side. I'd always suspected it. But to have witnessed it? To have made that ironclad control snap? It was the best kind of high I'd ever had—and I'd had many.

"How'd you sleep?" King asked as Zac took the barstool beside me.

"On and off. This storm is insane."

"Annoying is more like it," I grumbled, and eyed the pool that would be off-limits this morning with the lightning.

"Maybe it's a good chance for you to relax a little," Zac said. "You know, sit still for a moment?"

"That'll be no problem when I *die* from boredom."

"You're so dramatic."

"And you're such a kiss-ass. I still can't believe you brought homework on spring break."

"I brought work too," King said as he poured the eggs into the pan.

"You don't count. You're a teacher."

“Good to know. But in all seriousness, there’s a bookshelf in the other room. I’m sure you could find something in there to amuse yourself with while we work.”

“You want me to read a book? What part of *I’m not going to do anything scholastic* did you not hear?”

King grabbed several slices of bread and popped them into the toaster. “Reading can be fun. You just have to find something good.”

“Oh God.” I rolled my eyes. “The next thing you’re going to say is you want to teach me how to cook.”

“That’s an option too.”

“That’s a no. But dodging lightning in the pool is sounding really good about now.”

Zac snorted. “Moron.”

I shrugged and fell silent, once again cursing Mother Nature for ruining my fun as King served up three plates of fluffy scrambled eggs and toast, along with a carafe of chilled OJ that his chef had freshly squeezed the night before.

It wasn’t too bad for someone who didn’t do “fancy,” and once our stomachs were full, we moved back to the comfort of the main room. Or should I say, *they* got comfortable working. I got busy being bored.

Ten minutes passed.

Then twenty.

When it hit thirty I got up from my spot out on the covered balcony and headed back inside.

It wasn’t that I always needed to be entertained but—

Oh, who am I kidding?

“Sooo, while you two sit in here like the world’s most depressing episode of *Spring Break Gone Nerdtastic*, what am *I* supposed to do?”

King looked up from his laptop, where he was no doubt working on some kind of final torture test for his students. “Whatever you like. You have free rein of the house. Entertain yourself.”

Zac chuckled from the corner of the couch, where he sat with his feet tucked up under him and the books he’d brought splayed out on the cushion beside him. “I’m not sure he knows how to do that.”

“Yes I do.” I mean, I’d never *had* to, but I was sure I could—if I wanted to.

“Oh yeah?” Zac pulled the cap off a red pen, and I eyed it with disdain. He’d marked up plenty of my papers with that sucker. “Then what are you going to do?”

Good question. A swim was out. So was a walk. And these two were being all quiet and studious, so that left what? Twiddling my thumbs? Reading a book, like King had suggested? I didn’t fucking think so.

“I’m going to talk.” I looked down at King. “Isn’t that what you always tell me I should do more of?”

Whether it was to humor me, or he was genuinely interested, King closed his laptop and slid it onto the side table by his recliner. “Definitely. Did you have something in mind?”

I did, actually. Zac had said something to me yesterday about King and a significant other, and it had been niggling at the back of my mind ever since. Not because I was jealous, like Zac suggested, but because no matter how much I wanted to deny it, I was curious about King. I was usually the one who knew everything and anything, but it seemed with him, I’d finally met my match.

“Oh, you know, just a little *adult* conversation.”

King’s lips curved as he spread his arms wide across his lap and his robe fell open. “Want to come over here and have it?”

Fuck yes I did, but I knew the second I got on his lap all talking would cease, and I really *did* want to have this conversation.

What the hell was that about?

“I don’t think so. I don’t cuddle.”

“Right.” King ran his eyes down over me, and my pulse skipped a couple beats. “That would be too intimate.”

“Exactly, that’s for couples. People in love.” I looked to the empty end of the couch by Zac. “You think you could move your precious books?”

“You have hands.”

I sighed and scooped up his textbooks, putting them on the coffee table, then I settled into the opposite corner of the couch and stared at the enigmatic man watching us from across the room.

“So,” King said as he crossed one of his silk-clad legs over the other. “What’s on your mind, James?”

Up until now, my curiosity had been laser focused on one thing—who *was* King, and how had he gotten the money to afford all the things he had?

But now I found myself wanting to know about this other "someone" that he'd brought here. Another student? An ex-workmate?

"Who'd you used to bring down here before us?"

"*East*."

"What?" I glanced at Zac, who looked like he wanted to strangle me. "Were you not supposed to tell me that?"

"I—"

"It's okay, Zac," King said. "It's not a secret."

"No?" I cocked my head. "Then why didn't I find anything about it online?"

"Because it's private. There's a difference."

"Meaning?"

"*Meaning*, that my relationship with him wouldn't have gotten me fired or him expelled."

"Unlike us."

King inclined his head. "Despite what you might think, I don't usually sleep with my students."

My lips quirked up at the edges. "You haven't exactly been *sleeping* with us, either."

"Touché."

"So, okay, he wasn't a student. Someone you worked with?"

"Why does it matter?" King steepled his hands over his ripped abs, and for a second I lost my train of thought. "James?"

"Because you're so…mysterious."

"That drives you crazy, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

King smirked, obviously enjoying holding information over my head.

But I was determined. If Zac wouldn't ask the hard questions, I would. He may call it nosy. I called it getting to know someone.

"How long were you with him?"

"Long enough that it hurt when it was over."

"So it ended badly?"

"*East*," Zac said, and shook his head at King. "You don't have to answer that."

I rolled my eyes. "Oh come on, this is basic getting-to-know-you 101. And you know you're dying for him to spill his secrets."

Zac started to refute that, but then shrugged. “Maybe I am a little curious.”

“See?” I turned back to King. “You’ve got your TA admitting he doesn’t know shit about you. Does that make you feel guilty enough to give us the goods?”

King looked somewhat amused as he tapped one of his steepled fingers. “Have you ever considered law school? You’re persistent. Tenacious. And a total pain in the ass. You’d be perfect for it.”

“Stop trying to change the subject.”

“And you keep the witness on task.” King grinned. “Just think about it.”

If he thought he was going to sidetrack me, he had another thing coming. “Did you cheat on him?”

“No.”

“Did he cheat on you?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Did it end badly?” I asked again.

“Yes.”

Bam. He’d answered this time, and now I was more curious than ever.

“So what was it? You didn’t trust him with all your secrets about your hooded friends?”

King snapped his mouth shut, and something clicked.

“Wait,” I said, scooting to the edge of the couch. “Don’t tell me. He *is* one of your hooded friends?”

He stared at us, his finger stilling, the silence deafening until a shrill ringing jolted the quiet. It shook King out of his thoughts as he looked over at the landline.

“Oh, would you look at that,” I said. “Saved by the Bat-Signal.”

King swung his legs over the chair, and as he headed to answer the phone, Zac smacked my arm.

“Seriously? You think an inquisition is the way to go about getting answers?”

“I don’t see *you* doing any of the heavy lifting over here, so you don’t get a say in my methods. You could just say thanks.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

“That’s not a thanks.”

“No, it’s a—”

I clamped a hand over his mouth as King picked up the phone, his back to us, and barked out, “What is it?” He listened, his shoulders tense, and in the blink of an eye his entire body became as stiff as a board—much like it was back at Astor. “I told you I didn’t want to be disturbed.”

I glanced at Zac who was watching the exchange as intently as I was, and lowered my hand from his mouth. Whoever was on the other end was clearly someone King knew. He hadn’t even bothered to ask who it was before he started in on them.

“I leave for one week…” King scrubbed a hand over his face. “No. I’m not going to do that.” He shook his head. “Handle it. You don’t need me for that.”

My eyes bugged when he slammed down the phone, and as he stood there facing the kitchen, Zac’s mouth hung open. I wouldn’t want to be whoever was on the other end of that call either.

Finally, when King seemed to calm, he slowly turned back to where we sat, his dark eyes shifting between us before stopping on me.

“To answer your question, yes, he is one of my ‘hooded friends.’ Any other questions?”

“Nope.” I shook my head. “Just know you don’t ever have to worry about *me* falling in love with you.”

But as Zac remained suspiciously quiet, I thought, *But* he *might.*

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THIRTY-ONE

zac

A PRIVATE YACHT had docked at King's island while we were having breakfast Friday morning, and East let out a whoop.

"Hell yes, the chef is back," he said, pushing away his plate of half-eaten scrambled eggs and toast. With the storms the last couple of days, it hadn't been safe for any of King's staff to come, which meant we'd been at the mercy of our limited cooking knowledge. I may have helped my family run restaurants, but that didn't mean I was any good behind a grill.

King arched a brow where he stood at the kitchen island peeling one of the many bananas we'd gathered earlier in the week. "Are you trying to say you don't find my cooking to your standards, James?"

"I'm not *not* saying that."

He tossed the peel in the compost bin. "Then I guess I shouldn't tell you that's not the chef."

"Then who is it?"

"Wrong question."

"I didn't realize there was a Q&A session for breakfast."

King turned his eyes on me. "Care to hazard a guess?"

I glanced out at the yacht, and though I could see a couple of people onboard, they didn't look to be getting off. "We're going somewhere?"

He nodded. "We are."

"Oh shit." East was up and running in the direction of his room before I could even ask where.

"What are you doing?" I called after him.

“This requires pants,” was all he said before disappearing around the corner.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, we’d all boarded the Roi de la Mer—completely clothed—and were sipping on our welcome drinks. The sun was out in full force, and so was the wind as we sailed away from King’s island, which meant there was no telling what my hair would look like when we got to our destination. I figured East would be freaking out over his perfectly styled ’do getting blown to shit, but he was so happy to be going on an adventure that he didn’t seem to mind.

He also wasn’t bombarding King with any more questions. And King, being his usual full-of-surprises self, didn’t offer up any details, only letting us know the trip would take about twenty minutes.

That was fine by me. I didn’t mind crossing the water as long as no one threw me overboard into it.

“You good?” King asked, joining me at the railing.

I squinted at him behind my sunglasses and couldn’t help but notice for the hundredth time how damn good he looked. The crisp, loose white linen outfit he wore was such a stunning contrast to his dark skin, and the whole beachy vibe fit him so well it was hard to believe he spent most of his time all buttoned up.

Hell, it was hard to believe any of this was real. That I’d spent the week with him and East, that we were island hopping… If I knew it wouldn’t leave a mark, I’d ask East to pinch me.

“Am I good?” I said. “I couldn’t be better.”

“I’m happy to hear that.” King propped his forearms on the rail, so close his arm brushed against mine. His touch sent a current of electricity through me that had my stomach doing a somersault.

In the distance, an island that was far more inhabited than King’s came into view. Against the bright blue sky and aquamarine water, it made for an unbelievable picture.

“This is all so incredible,” I said. “Thank you for bringing us here.”

“Us?” The side of King’s mouth tipped up.

“Well, me, but I’ll include East in that, since I’m sure he’ll never say thanks.”

“He has, actually, but I’m far more interested in the way you both refer to each other together without realizing it.”

My brows pulled together and I took a long sip of my rum cocktail. I couldn't remember saying or even thinking about East and me as an "us."

"That's not a bad thing," King added. "Just thought I'd point it out."

"I appreciate that, but there's no world where the two of us make sense. He's more likely to leave me on whatever that island is when he finds a hot new conquest."

"You never know. He might surprise you." King brought his drink to his lips and paused. "And if he doesn't, I'll make sure to keep you close."

Goddamn it, there went my stomach again, flipping like a maniac at the implication behind his words. I had to be reading into it. Wishful thinking and all.

"You know what I realized?" East said, squeezing in between us. "This boat has enough room for an abundance of shopping bags."

A booming laugh escaped me at his random comment. It was so out of nowhere, and so East, but that was one of the things I could say I enjoyed about him. He was always the most entertaining guy in the room with that mouth of his.

"You're not wrong," King said, an amused glint to his eyes. "But unfortunately for you, we won't be utilizing the boat for that today."

"What? No shopping?" East's full lips pursed into a pout, and I couldn't help but want to suck on it. Who knew I'd find his petulant side so sexy?

"No shopping, but don't worry," King said, and reached out to brush a thumb over East's pouty lip. "I have a feeling you're going to enjoy what I have in mind a whole lot more than spending money."

East nipped at King's thumb. "Does it involve spending *yours*?"

"Yes, it does." King chuckled and looked to me. "But I have a feeling it'll be worth every single penny."

Oh shit. The way those words rolled off King's tongue, and the scorching perusal he gave us, had my heart pounding.

Who was I kidding? Every time he talked to me in a way that wasn't teacher/student, my chest tightened. Add in the conversation we'd had about his being in a past relationship, and the fact he'd opened up to me and East and told us something so personal, and that annoying emotion, hope, kept trying to creep into my brain.

It was stupid, I knew, to hope for anything beyond the here and now. But as we stood there, the three of us, laughing in the morning sun, I couldn't remember ever being more content.

I turned around and leaned back against the rail, deciding if I only had a limited time to enjoy King out of Astor, then I was damn well going to make the most of it.

"So are you going to tell us where we're going?" I asked, trailing my eyes down the open collar of his shirt to his chest. "Or is this another one of those secrets you love to keep?"

"It's not so much that I love secrets. But I do like a good surprise every now and then." He leaned in and put his lips by my ear. "Like you, for example. You were a really fucking good surprise."

God that was hot. *So* damn hot, and if he were anyone other than who he was…

Fuck it.

I turned my head and boldly took the mouth that had just made my dick pound as hard as my heart. When King grabbed the back of my neck and thrust his tongue in to tangle with mine, I just about collapsed at his feet.

He hummed as he brushed his lips over mine. "See? Surprises can be very good."

"Hello, *I* want a surprise."

A laugh escaped me at East's put-out tone, then King turned on him and said, "Oh you'll get one, little prince. But you're going to have to wait."

East opened his mouth, to no doubt protest, but the captain came over the speaker announcing our arrival in Anguilla in minutes.

King let out a chuckle. "Well, there you go. That's where we are."

"Aww, guess your captain didn't get the memo on the surprise, but it seems you have a few more up your sleeve." East smirked. "And we all know I'm both of your awesome surprise."

"You're something, all right," King said.

I lowered my sunglasses and winked at East. "Haven't quite figured out what just yet."

"Well, when you want to shower me with admiration, I'm right here. I respond well to flattery. Compliments. Gifts."

As the boat began to dock, I leaned in by East's ear and said, "Careful. Your massive ego's about to outsize your dick."

"Don't worry, I know how to wield both. Or have you forgotten already?" As East reached for the button of his shorts, King swatted his hand away, curled his fingers in the waistband, and tugged him forward.

“Trust us, you’re unforgettable.” He brushed his lips over East’s, teasing and nipping at them before pulling back. “And that includes your mouth.”

NEVER WOULD I ever doubt a “King surprise.” The man knew better than we did what we wanted, and that was probably the reason he’d become so secretly successful.

A day of relaxation in nature’s spa was what he’d had up his sleeve. We started off with massage treatments on a quiet stretch of the beach under canopies before taking a dip in the hot springs nearby. Then we were led down to another private oasis—a mud bath, also the place where East suddenly started questioning his life choices.

“Just dip your toe in. It feels great,” I said as I slid into the warm, silky bath. It was immediately relaxing, and if East would just try it, maybe all that inner tension would melt out of him.

He pursed his lips. “I don’t believe you.”

“Just do it,” I said. “I dare you.”

“It smells like mud and…cocoa or something.” He bent down to examine it a little closer. “What’s the purpose of lounging in— *Oh shit*.”

King caught him off guard, yanking him down into the dark grey depths. The shouts coming out of East as he splashed shoulder-first into the mud had me howling, especially when he got to his feet and looked down at his mud-covered body with disbelief.

“Look at you,” I said, and whistled. “You’ve never looked sexier.”

He sent a wave of mud my way before turning on King, who wisely began to back away to escape East’s wrath.

“Come on, little prince. You have to admit it feels unbelievable.”

East narrowed his eyes, stalking King slowly. “*Unbelievable* is the right word.”

But the problem with East was that he became so focused on one goal, he completely missed the way I snuck in behind him. Before he could lunge at King, I wrapped my arms around him, pinning his arms to his sides. He immediately tried to squirm out of my hold, but I winked at King and then pressed a kiss to the side of East’s neck that hadn’t been dirtied up yet.

“See what happens when you’re not paying attention?” I said. “You get double-teamed.”

East stopped fighting me and went still in my arms. “Ooh, now that sounds like fun.”

King moved in front of him, scooped a bit of mud in his hand, and ran it over East's chest. Those strong fingers kneaded his pecs before trailing lower, leaving streaks of grey along his skin.

East's head fell back against my shoulder. "You're right. This does feel unbelievable."

I kissed my way down to the corner of his lips as King's hands dipped below the mud, and when a soft gasp fell from East's mouth, I was right there to swallow it. It didn't take a genius to know what was happening beneath the surface as King's arm began to move, but the thick mud at least shielded us from any prying eyes.

East shifted against me, rubbing his ass up against my growing erection, and Jesus, I would never look at mud the same again.

I speared my tongue between East's lips, tasting the alcohol from his drink on the way over, and King moved in close and licked a path up my cheek.

Oh *God*. This had to be one of my top three most erotic moments, as East continued to writhe between us and King's mouth found my ear.

"How about we take this somewhere we can actually finish what we're starting here…?"

"Take us there," I said in a voice that I barely recognized, and King's sensual smile made me want to lunge forward and take it with my own.

"Follow me." He backed up and out of the mud, rising to his impressive height, and the sight of him standing there, his cock barely contained by his shorts, was a sight I memorized and promised myself I'd never fucking forget.

East stared up at the magnificent man in front of us, and when he didn't move, I figured he was in the same sex trance I was, and that just wouldn't do.

"Go," I said, and gently urged him forward. As East waded out of the mud, I followed.

King strode through the lush grounds like he was one with everything around him. The colorful tropical plants with their vibrant colors and wide green leaves offered a shaded path as we made our way barefoot along the smooth stones toward the sound of burbling water.

King moved aside several low-hanging leaves like a curtain, and it was like we'd entered a whole new world.

Straight ahead of us, white, bubbling water cascaded over a towering rock wall and into the plunge pool below, where clear water sparkled under the sun and beckoned us closer.

“Holy shit.” East took a step forward, shaking his head. “This place is…”

King glanced over his shoulder. “Don’t tell me I’ve finally rendered *the* James Easton speechless?”

He held his hand out, and shock of all shocks, East took it.

I smiled, enjoying the way King was slowly seducing him. I don’t even think East realized it either, because if he had the slightest inkling he was on a date, he would’ve run in the other direction faster than his legs could carry him.

King glanced past East to where I was watching the two of them and winked. He knew exactly what he was doing, and it was impressive to watch. It also, surprisingly, had me looking at East in ways I never had before.

“Time to wash this mud off, don’t you think?” King gestured to the waterfall then started around the edge of the glistening pool. “Let’s go.”

We carefully made our way around the edge until we reached the running water, and the misty spray of the fall felt amazing against my warm skin.

“There’s a ledge underneath the waterfall,” King told us, and reached for East’s shorts.

I quickly stripped and watched with hungry eyes when King did the same, and as his luscious cock came into view, my stomach flipped.

Fuck he was beautiful, and seeing his body’s response to us was so hot I thought I might overheat. Then his eyes found mine, his message clear: *Let’s finish this.*

King disappeared behind the curtain of water, and when East just stood there watching after him, I nudged at his shoulder.

“You okay?”

East’s eyes were glassy with arousal, and I put a hand to his back. I desperately wanted to know what was running through his head in that moment, but I didn’t want to break whatever spell he seemed to be under.

Instead, I let my fingers flirt over the crack of his ass. “King’s waiting for you.”

“And you.”

“So let’s go.”

East licked his lips and carefully made his way under the rushing water, and the second we were hidden from view, King reached for him.

Their mouths collided in a brutal kiss, King’s hands reaching for his face and holding him still while his tongue plundered. East braced his hands on King’s rock-hard chest and moaned, but the sound of the water was louder now that we were underneath it, and it drowned out anything other than the rushing of the blood in my head.

I moved in behind East, taking his hips between my hands as I aligned my cock with his ass, and when he thrust back on me, I cursed. God he felt good. He always did. His plump cheeks always cradled my dick just right, and that tight, hot hole was even better.

The mud on our skin was starting to dry, but the spray from the waterfall dampened it again, making the three of us a mess as our moans echoed off the cave walls.

King ripped his mouth free, breathing heavily, and reached for East’s hand resting on his chest. “I’m the one that got you filthy. Let’s clean you up.”

I took hold of East’s other hand as King led us to the waterfall and counted us off. We jumped through it together on three, falling through the air several feet before hitting the clear blue water. My fingers lost their hold on East’s, and when I resurfaced, it was King that ended up closest to me. He was reaching for East’s legs and wrapping them around his waist, sliding his hands over his thighs and loosening the caked mud from his skin.

I bit down on my lip as I closed the distance, King’s broad back to me. Mud still clung to his body, and I couldn’t stop myself from wanting to run my hands all over him. He was just so beautiful. They *both* were, and while we were here, in this place, there was no reason not to take exactly what I wanted.

Reaching for King, I slid my hands around to the small of his back and drew them up slowly, rinsing him off to reveal that smooth skin that had deepened after our week here. He turned his head my way, and instinctively I leaned in to kiss his full lips, my hands never stopping their mission to get him all clean. East was of the same mind, washing off the front of him, and when his hands dipped under the water, King let out a hiss that was so sexy it had my cock pulsing against his ass.

“Use me.” His throaty demand was directed at both of us, and he didn’t have to tell either of us twice.

King grabbed on to East’s thighs, holding him tighter against his body and keeping him afloat as East wrapped his hand around both their dicks, the water no doubt helping to make it a slick slide to get them off.

Meanwhile, I had King’s backside all to myself for the first time this trip, and those muscled globes were practically begging me to get off between them. I licked my lips and gave my cock a few strokes, anticipation building low in my gut.

I smoothed my hands over King’s ass and pressed a kiss to the back of his neck. With my erection jerking between our bodies, I was making my intention clear, in case the ultimate top in our threesome wasn’t interested.

But King only met my eyes and said, “I told you to use me,” giving me the permission to do just that. Use his body for my own personal satisfaction.

Spreading his cheeks, I nestled my cock between them and began to rut up against him. “Oh fuck.” I dropped my forehead to his back and gripped his hips, increasing the speed as the sound of East and King’s moans and heavy breathing spurred me on.

King was letting us have complete control over his body, East from the front, me from the back, letting us dictate the pace, the action. With every thrust against him, I could feel the tug from East working them over. My release built fast, quicker than I’d anticipated, but King felt too damn good, and never having him like this was too much to draw out.

My head fell back on a shout as my hips jerked with the orgasm his ass wrenched out of me, and it wasn’t long after that King and East both came with guttural sounds that were so raw it was like they’d been milked for every last drop.

As my breathing evened out, the spray from the waterfall misted over our bodies. No one moved to unravel themselves from the other, just relishing the moment in a place that was our own personal paradise.

Then, for the first time since we’d entered the waterfall, East’s lips curved into a wicked smile and he nodded. “Okay, that surprise was worth the wait. Best spa day ever.”

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THIRTY-TWO

east

I'D NEVER BEEN tipsy on rum a day in my life—only because I never drank the stuff—but a couple of fresh horchata daiquiris in, courtesy of the locals' recommendation, and I was feeling goooood.

I swayed my hips to the sound of the band's steel drums and danced all up on Zac, who'd been watching and laughing, but needed more liquid courage. Or persuasion from me.

"You know you want to dance with me," I said, rubbing myself on him and nuzzling my nose beneath his ear.

"Do I?" His grin gave him away, and so did the way his dark eyes were lit up. Or maybe that was just the reflection of all the lights strung up across the main street in the center of town. After dinner—and a little bit of shopping, at my request—we'd run into the weekly Friday night street fest, where King had proven to be Mr. Popular.

Everyone seemed to know him here, and they all called him "Ty." Short for Tyrone, though I couldn't see calling him anything but what he was.

King.

"Come on, let's make King jealous so he'll ditch that woman." I grabbed Zac's hands, placed them on my hips, and then wound my arms around his neck, forcing him to move to the beat with me.

From a few feet away, King was indeed watching us, but being ever the gentleman by obliging the elderly bar owner with a spin.

As I caught his eye, I pretended to pout, not liking that I had to share him on this perfect day, even if it was just for a song.

"He's being nice," Zac said, chuckling at my put-out expression.

“He’d be nic*er* if he was over here shaking his ass with us.”

“So greedy.” His lips against my temple sent a shiver through me. Or maybe it was the breeze coming off the ocean now that the sun had gone down.

The song changed then, the beat kicking up a bit, and shouts and whoops went through the crowd like it was a favorite.

Zac took a step back like he was going to go and sit it out, but before he could get too far, I slipped my fingers into the waistband of his shorts and pulled him back to me.

“Where you think you’re goin’?” I swayed my hips against his. “The party’s just gettin’ started.”

“East, I don’t like to—”

“Have fun?”

“Dance.”

He reached down, about to move my hand, when a voice we’d know blindfolded in a dark cavern—*ha*—shouted over the loud beat.

“Now that’s a shame.” King moved in behind Zac, caging him between us. “I was just coming to join you two.”

My eyes shifted to the glittering ones staring down at me, as King aimed a sly, conspiratorial smirk my way.

“It’s just… I’m not…” Zac glanced over his shoulder, no doubt trying to think up some lame excuse to ditch us. But I wasn’t having it, not tonight.

“Drunk enough?” I leaned in and pressed a hard kiss to his cheek. “Leave that to me.” I danced my way back from him, and as they watched me, I pointed at King. “Don’t let him go anywhere.”

Heat flickered in King’s eyes as he nodded, took hold of Zac’s arm, and spun him.

I made a beeline to the bar to get us another round of those horchata daiquiri thingies, and told the bartender to go heavy on the rum with Zac’s—guy needed to loosen up. But when I turned back to face the dance floor, it seemed rum wasn’t what was needed—just a big, bossy King.

I didn’t usually get off on being told what to do and when. But even I was starting to see the appeal of being one of King’s…subjects. I wanted to serve that man in *any* way he wanted. And watching him now with Zac? Fuck, they were hot together.

King had Zac’s arms looped around his neck while he held him tight around the waist, and the way he stepped forward on each beat and dipped

his leg between Zac's had me reaching down to rub my palm over my growing erection.

A throat cleared behind me, and I looked back to see the bartender with our drinks. I went to reach for them, and she gestured to King out on the dance floor.

"You're here with Ty?"

God it was weird to hear him called that. "Yeah, for the week."

"That's what we heard. We were so excited to hear he was coming tonight. It's been a long time."

Jesus, it was like he was some sort of celebrity down here. But instead of paparazzi out waiting to take his photo, it was locals eagerly waiting for a moment to catch up with him like they'd known him for years.

I shrugged and scooped up the drinks. "He's probably been busy."

"Well, it's nice to see him back and so…happy."

I wasn't about to touch that. I recognized that heart-in-eyes look, like she thought something romantic was happening between King and possibly one of the two men he was dancing with under the moonlit night.

I wasn't going to be the one to tell her he was happy because he'd spent a week fucking us.

"Right, well…thanks." I headed back to the dance floor before she could ask when the wedding was.

King still had a tight hold on Zac, keeping him right where I'd instructed, but Zac didn't seem to be complaining one bit. In fact, he was starting to relax into it even without the rum.

"Another one of these and we might see him strip for us," I said. I'd be down for that show.

"Don't even think about it." Zac shook his head, but plucked one of the drinks out of my arms anyway.

I handed another to King just as he was clapped on the back by someone passing by. He greeted the guy briefly and waved, and I arched a brow.

"So, I don't know if you noticed, Zac, but it appears we're in the presence of a celebrity on this island." I tapped a finger against King's chest where his shirt was unbuttoned. "Are you hiding another secret from us? Are you actually royalty?"

King brought his drink to his lips and took a long swallow. "What makes you think that?"

“First, that you’re full of secrets.” I glanced at Zac, who nodded in agreement. “And second, everyone here knows you. Even the bartender said they were sooo excited when they heard you were coming.” I paused. “And I don’t think they meant at the waterfall.”

A booming laugh escaped King, the deep, throaty sound so at ease that I couldn’t help but grin.

His hand came to rest on my lower back as he took another draw of his daiquiri. “No, I don’t think they’d be thrilled about that. If my parents were still here, the gossip would’ve landed at their doorstep within the hour.”

Zac’s brows shot up. “Your parents? You’re *from* here?”

King nodded. “Born and raised. And no, they weren’t royalty, but it’s a small island. Everyone knows everyone going back for generations.”

It took longer than it should for that piece of information to make its way through the rum haze. “Holy shit.”

“So you’re the hometown boy who made it big,” Zac started, and I finished, “And that’s why you bought an island nearby.”

King spread his hands wide. “There’s no place like home.”

“Wait a minute. Why haven’t you been here in a while? The woman at the bar said it’s been a long time.”

“Busted.” Zac took a noisy draw of his drink, which was definitely kicking in now. The strip show would be happening *any*time.

“You don’t want to hear about all that,” King said, setting his drink to the side. I was about to protest when he rolled his hips to the beat of the drum, and I lost all train of thought.

Luckily, Zac still had some sort of brain function. “Sure we do. We wanna know everything about you.”

Maybe the rum had loosened his tongue a little *too* much, because sober Zac never would’ve admitted his infatuation. Not that it wasn’t written all over his face.

“Later,” King said, taking both our drinks and setting them with his. Then he grabbed our hands and pulled us toward him. “Dance with me.”

He didn’t have to ask me twice. The beat was infectious, and with the way his body was moving, I wanted to be all up on it.

King pushed one of his legs between my thighs, giving me something to ride as I rocked my hips, and Zac joined in on the other side, the three of us connected by wandering hands that pulled the others closer.

I’d always thought taking on two guys at once would be too much work and not enough reward, so I’d dismissed any idea of a threesome. But with King and Zac it was so easy. I wanted them both, and seeing them together was just as sexy as the two of them turning their attention on me.

Like now, for instance, the way we all just fit together. It shouldn’t work, and under any other circumstance, I was certain it wouldn’t. But here tonight, under the string lights and full of rum daiquiris, it was the perfect end to one of the best days I’d ever had.

“Where’d you go?” King asked by my ear.

“Absolutely nowhere.” I rubbed his arm, not about to admit anything I wouldn’t remember tomorrow. “And don’t think I didn’t notice what you did just now.”

“And what’s that?”

“You used *sex* to distract us.”

King chuckled. “Did I?”

Zac swayed a little closer and nodded. “You did.”

“It’s only a distraction if it works.” King ran a hand down over my ass and gave it a light squeeze. “So, you two want to get out of here? Or you want to stay and talk about my family some more?”

Zac’s blown pupils said he was more than ready to get out of there, and if King wanted to use sex to distract us, we weren’t going to stop him.

“Lead the way, your royal highness, and we shall follow.”

King took our hands, and as he led us toward the dock, he smirked. “No more drinks for you.”

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THIRTY-THREE

king

IT WAS EARLY Saturday morning when I woke to the unfamiliar sounds of soft, easy breathing beside me, and a leg thrown over the top of mine in a relaxed hold.

It'd been a long time since I'd woken up to anything other than an empty bed, but when the three of us returned from the main island, we'd naturally ended up here. We'd had every intention of continuing our evening but instead stripped down, climbed under the sheets, and promptly fell asleep.

Together.

In my bedroom.

In my bed.

I turned to look at the two beside me—East on his side, his leg the one keeping me in place, and behind him Zac, the big spoon to the little prince.

They looked so comfortable with one another, as if they'd been sleeping like this for years. But I knew this was as much a first for them as it was me. They were adamant in their refusal of their status being anything more than casual, had admitted to never spending a full night together—or, as East would say, "cuddling."

You would never know that looking at them now. And if I didn't know better, I never would have guessed they were nothing more than a hookup. Because the more time I spent around them, the more I realized that the only people truly oblivious to what was going on between them were the two involved.

It was sweet. Though East would likely rather die than admit it.

As quietly as I could, I carefully extricated myself from his hold, and when he shifted on the bed and snuggled into the pillow, Zac followed behind him. My chest tightened at the picture they made, so relaxed and peaceful in the cloud of white sheets. There was an innocence there, a purity that came from youth.

Not something I would have ever thought I'd associate with James Easton—until this very moment.

I envied them that. The lack of cynicism that came with age. Maybe then I wouldn't find myself needing a moment to think, a moment to clear my head, a moment to remind myself that, come tomorrow, we'd be back in the real world, where all of this could no longer be.

It'd been a nice escape from the hustle and bustle that was my everyday life, but I was well aware that everything would change the second we returned.

I grabbed my robe from the end of the bed and slipped into it before heading out to the balcony to clear my head. The thoughts rattling around it were ones I couldn't afford to have, not when I was expected to go back to Astor on Monday and act like I hadn't spent the week inside these two unbelievably gorgeous men.

But what other choice did I have? I couldn't pursue this. Couldn't pursue *them*. I was their professor, for fuck's sake. Not to mention the head of an organization recruiting them into a world they'd yet to even *begin* to comprehend.

There were so many reasons this could go wrong that the idea I was looking for a way to continue it was absurd. Plus, neither of them had mentioned wanting anything more than a week of hot sex, so why was I even contemplating it?

I ran a hand over my face and leaned against the rail, staring into the starlit sky, the sun not yet a thought on the horizon. I knew exactly why I was thinking about it. This was the first time in a long while that I'd stopped and enjoyed myself, that I'd given myself permission to feel again—and now that I had, I didn't relish the idea of going back to such a solitary existence.

Not that I wasn't living a life I'd purposely set out for myself, one I'd been content with. Or so I thought. I'd built my career brick by brick, had chosen to detour a bit filling in at Astor, but now my time there was coming to an end and it would be back to business.

It was interesting that my first thought wasn't the free time I'd have to pursue some of the opportunities that were coming my way, but of Zac. Though we'd never had anything more than a professional relationship until now, I'd no longer be seeing him every day. No polite hellos, no glimpses into his life. No jokes or even grumblings when someone annoyed him in class. For some reason, all of that was a source of comfort somehow, a daily routine I found myself missing already.

Strange.

I sat in one of the rocking chairs and kicked my feet up on the rail, so many thoughts flooding my mind that going back to sleep didn't seem fathomable. At least not until I worked through them.

It was a shame I hadn't grabbed a box of cigars at the market yesterday. Then again, sitting out here watching the sunrise or sunset with a Cohiba was something I always did with my ex, and I wasn't about to fall into old habits.

With my foot on the rail, I rocked back and forth, trying to just enjoy the peace that came with this place. I made the attempt to visit when I needed to clear my head, but the trips were usually quick and never gave me time or the desire to head over to Anguilla. I couldn't even remember how long it had been. Probably right after things had ended with my ex and I was looking for distractions in all the wrong places. It was hard enough he was still in my immediate orbit, even though the romantic feelings were long gone. I couldn't escape him; it wasn't that easy. He was a permanent, untouchable fixture whether I liked it or not.

So what the hell had I been thinking getting involved with Zac and East after introducing them to that world?

I hadn't been. They'd blindsided me with the force of their lust, and I'd lost my damn mind.

But instead of the regret I *should* feel over every decision I'd made since the night they confessed to wanting me, all I felt was satisfied. In every fucking way.

They let me dominate them in a way I craved, the way I'd had to fight tooth and nail for with my ex. Two alphas who didn't know the meaning of give and take, who refused to compromise, was never a winning combination, and I wished I could say that was the only reason we'd ended things. That I'd had the sense to know we weren't a good match before it became brutally obvious.

I liked my privacy. Needed it. It was why I kept my identity hidden to those outside my closest inner circle. Why I ran things without being the face of my companies. Why I built an estate on a private island no one could get to. Being with someone who needed the limelight like it was an intrinsic part of him? It just didn't work.

Closing my eyes, I breathed in deep, forcing my past to clear out on the exhale. I didn't need to think about any of that, not when being back here had lifted the weight I didn't know I'd been carrying.

And whether I liked it or not, most of that was because of the two currently tangled in my bedsheets. I'd never expected to take as much pleasure from having them around, from their companionship and levity. It was a breath of fresh air. Zac, with his quiet confidence, such a ball buster when he had to be, but who had obviously found the perfect balance in his life.

Then there was East. Obnoxious as ever, but endlessly curious and amusing. A challenge for sure, but the vulnerability he hid had me dying to peel the layers away to see what was underneath.

The three of us were as different as night and day, but sharing this week with them was something I'd always remember.

So why am I out here alone instead of spending every last minute enjoying their company?

I lowered my feet from the rail and stood up, taking in one last look at the sanctuary I called my own. Then I quietly slipped back inside to join the two still fast asleep.

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THIRTY-FOUR

east

THE BED DIPPED, there was a rustling of sheets, and then King's familiar scent was back beside me. Still half asleep, I reached out for him, throwing my leg over the top of his, and he responded by sliding his arm over my waist.

I knew I was dreaming, because I never slept in the same bed as anyone else. But I couldn't deny that it felt good to have the weight of both King and Zac's arms resting across me, their bodies warm and their quiet breathing in my ears.

Huh. I *was* still asleep, right?

I opened my eyes and startled when I saw King staring back at me. He felt me jerk and smoothed his hand over my hip.

"Sorry to wake you. Go back to sleep." He settled in on his pillows and closed his eyes, but I was wide awake now.

It was still dark out, so we couldn't have been asleep for long. I tried to remember how we'd all ended up in King's bed, because I couldn't imagine I'd chosen to pass out in the middle of his huge mattress with them. He slept alone—he'd said so the first night. Hell, so did I. So did Zac.

But Zac was curled around me from behind, his entire front pressed against my entire back, holding me tight to him.

My heart began to beat faster, sweat breaking out on my lip as I struggled to breathe. My first instinct was that I needed to break free from the cuddle-fest happening against my will. They were suffocating me, their limbs thrown over my body to keep me trapped.

“Calm down, little prince.” King’s words were soft as he trailed reassuring fingers up and down my side.

Warm lips sleepily kissed between my shoulder blades as Zac stirred behind me, and slowly my heart rate began to come back down.

“There you go,” King said quietly before pressing a kiss to my forehead. “Sleep now.”

But the time for shuteye was a thing of the past with the realization of where I was, and with whom.

I tried to lie there still and silent—not something that ever suited me—and several minutes later I felt King’s inaudible chuckle vibrating against me.

He opened his eyes. “You don’t have to stay if you don’t want to.”

“Do you want me to stay?” I found myself asking before I fully thought the question through.

Again, he smoothed his hand over my sheet-covered hip, rubbing back and forth in a soothing motion. “I think I do.”

It was strange. I should’ve bolted the fuck out of there at his words, but his dark eyes held me in a trance. That was the only way to explain it. I couldn’t possibly *want* to be there.

“Okay, well, I guess I’ll stay,” I said, and then added, “But only because you want me to.”

“Okay.”

One word—that was all he said to one of the most monumental decisions of my life. Then his eyes drifted shut again.

Right, now what? I lay as still as I possibly could, trying to decide where to put my hands so he didn’t think I was too needy or—God forbid—clingy. I glanced down the bed to where my leg was thrown haphazardly over his and slowly started to shift it off him, but before I even moved it an inch, he clamped his hand around the back of my thigh and held it in place.

“I thought you were going to stay?”

“I am. I just, well…”

One of King’s eyes opened, his lips twitching. “You seem nervous.”

“I’m not nervous.”

“Then just relax.”

“That’d be a great idea if I didn’t have a steel pipe up against my back.”

King chuckled, his eyes drifting over my shoulder to where Zac was curled around me like I was some sort of comfort pillow, or worse…*lover*.

“He doesn’t seem ready to wake up just yet. Must be dreaming about something good.”

“Not sure why he’s hugging me, then.”

A frown pulled between King’s dark brows. “You don’t think you’re good?”

“Depends what we’re talking about. Good at getting what I want, yes. Good at sex? Again, yes. But good in general… I’ve never been accused of that.”

“That might be true to some extent.”

“*Some*? Pretty sure that up until, oh, maybe a week ago, you would’ve shared that opinion.”

King tapped my thigh and nodded. “You’re right. I did. But you know what I’ve learned this past week?”

“I’m sure you’re dying to tell me.”

“You’re good for him. *With* him.”

“Him…?”

“Don’t do that,” King whispered against my lips. “Don’t make this less than what it is because you’re actually *feeling* something.”

I was about to vehemently deny that, but Zac picked that exact moment to stir behind me. His arms tightened and pulled me back against him as he nuzzled warm lips up against my neck, and King raised his brows and mouthed, *Deny it.*

I wanted to. But the surprise of it all was that Zac felt pretty damn good like this.

“Who am I to deny the guy what he’s obviously desperate for?” I said.

“Who’s desperate?” a sleepy voice mumbled against my back.

King shook his head at me. “No one,” he told Zac. “Go back to sleep.”

“You know, you’re bossy for a guy who woke us up,” I said.

“My apologies.”

He didn’t sound too sorry. “Where’d you go, anyway?”

“Out on the balcony.”

“To get away from us?”

“If I wanted to get away from you, I wouldn’t have come back.”

I didn’t recognize the feeling in the pit of my stomach, but it felt like something did a backflip.

I brushed it off.

“What are you talking about?” Zac said, lifting his head. Then he froze. “Wait, what are you doing in my bed?”

“You’re in *my* bed,” King answered.

Zac frowned and took a look around the room—not that he’d be able to see much in the dark. “Oh damn. Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.” King ran his hand from my waist up to Zac’s arm that was still folded around me. “Stay. East isn’t going anywhere either.”

“Only because you’re clinging to me like a koala,” I said over my shoulder. “I thought you didn’t cuddle.”

“I don’t.” Zac propped himself up on his elbow, and I noticed he didn’t bother moving away from me. “You are a pretty good pillow, though.”

“Don’t get used to it.”

“I think I will. Just to drive you crazy.”

“Not if I smother you with *this* pillow first.”

Zac glanced down at where my leg was intertwined with King’s, and a smug grin curled his mouth. “I think you protest too much.”

“Nope.”

“You do. You like this.”

“Not a bit. You can get off me now.”

King leaned down and nipped at my lower lip. “Don’t worry. Your secret’s safe with us.”

He didn’t give me room to argue, not when he kept my mouth busy. It must’ve been a trick he’d picked up from Zac, who kissed along my shoulder, clearly awake now.

Truthfully, this wasn’t so bad. Being sandwiched between two of the sexiest men I’d ever been with and waking up to wandering hands and mouths on me? I could get used to that.

What? No. No, you won’t get used to it.

We were leaving soon, and the door would be slammed shut on anything more than this one week of escaping reality. None of this counted when we were back in the city.

I thought that fact would bring relief, but all I felt was a dull ache between my ribs. Another entirely unfamiliar feeling that I wanted nothing to do with.

“I don’t do secrets and I *don’t* cuddle,” I said.

I squirmed out of their arms with much more effort than I’d put in earlier, my pulse racing, and not in the I’m-so-turned-on kind of way.

“I’m getting hot.” I kicked the sheets away and scooted down off the mattress. “Is anyone else hot?”

When I turned back to face the bed, I saw Zac shifting across the mattress to take my place by King.

“I’m quite comfortable,” King said as he pulled the sheet up over their hips. “Zac?”

Zac snuggled into his side with a grin. “I’m *very* comfortable.”

King pressed his lips to the top of Zac’s head and winked at me. “Well then, if you change your mind, we’ll keep a spot warm for you.”

My eyes narrowed on the pair who seemed to be taking great delight in my discomfort, their lips barely able to contain their smirks. But I didn’t care. I wasn’t getting back in that bed. They could snuggle, cuddle, make moon eyes all morning—count me out.

I didn’t do romance.

I didn’t do *this*.

But as I reached the door to King’s room, I couldn’t stop myself from taking a final look over my shoulder, and wondered—what if I did?

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THIRTY-FIVE

zac

WOW. WHAT A week.

I'd never gotten excited about spring break in the past, as a week of drunk revelry was not really my idea of fun. But a week living out every single fantasy I'd ever had—and some I didn't even know I had—might've just turned spring break into my favorite holiday ever.

One thing was for certain—I'd never be able to think of this time of the year again without visions of East and King walking shirtless on a beach, dancing in the moonlight, and rolling around naked on every possible surface of the island retreat.

It'd been the best week of my life, and as I looked across the private plane to where the two men responsible for that sat, I realized I didn't want it to end.

Which was insane, of course. And not at all plausible.

Out here, we were a world away from who we were back in the city. The titles and relationships we had with one another had melted away, leaving us to write on a blank page what we wanted to happen.

But the second we set foot back in Astor, East would revert to the leader of the Park Avenue Princes, the obnoxious pain in my ass. And King would become Professor Kingston, my boss and mentor, and possible leader of some organization who had their eye on me.

It was a strange predicament I now found myself in, yet one I wouldn't change for the world. King had said a week. That was all this would be. And no matter how much I wished it could be more, I knew the other two weren't interested.

“You’re being very quiet over there.” East stretched his legs and ran his foot up the inside of mine. “Worried you might get in trouble with your professor for not finishing your homework over the break?”

God, if someone had told me a week ago that East’s outlandish mouth would be a source of comfort and normalcy for me, I would’ve told them they’d lost their mind. But his ability to make a tense situation less than with his sarcasm was something I was really coming to lo—*like* about him.

A rumbling chuckle left the man in question, as King’s eyes found mine from across the plane. “I’m sure his *professor* will understand if he explains what he was doing instead.”

East gasped and brought a hand to his mouth, then in his best Southern accent drawled, “Why, Professor Kingston, that would not be proper at all.”

King’s mouth tugged into that delicious smirk I’d forever associate with him now. It was a slow, sensual pull of his lips that usually resulted in something sinful coming out of them.

“You’re probably right, but I’m sure he wouldn’t complain.”

Wait—so did that mean he was *okay* with us talking about this once we landed?

“Aww.” East leaned over the arm of his chair and stroked his hand down King’s thick bicep. “You’re going to miss us. That’s sweet.”

King grunted and gave a slight shrug. “The way it has to be.”

That tiny semblance of hope that had crept in for a second instantly deflated at those words. No, it wasn’t going to be okay to talk about this once we got home.

This was not going to be easy.

How was I ever supposed to look at King and not want to kiss him or put my hands on him? To not have the freedom to do so?

And East… It wasn’t much different with him. We’d never put a timeline on our hookups, but if they continued, they’d still be a secret. The last thing he’d want was for his friends to find out about us.

“I don’t like it.” I blurted the words out before I could stop them. But if there was one thing that had changed over the last few days, it was that I felt more comfortable putting myself out there, even if I hadn’t meant to do it in quite that way.

King met my eyes. “I know.”

East averted his gaze, choosing to look out the window as he brought his drink to his lips. He probably couldn’t wait to get off the plane and back

to his life. He hadn’t been able to get out of the bed with us fast enough yesterday, and there definitely hadn’t been a repeat of our little slumber party last night. Not that I hadn’t considered it. It’d been nicer than I’d expected to wake up tangled in East, but I also wasn’t here for anything one-sided.

King had tried to tell me he could see our being more, but there was no way in hell East would ever consider opening himself up enough to be in a real relationship.

Relationship.

The word was unfamiliar even in my own mind. I’d had a few short ones over the years that probably would fit better in the generic “dating” category, but I’d been too busy the last couple of years with school, learning the family business, and assisting King, and any other professor that asked for my help, that it didn’t leave much time for anything more than a hookup. Something that seemed to suit East too.

Like he could feel my inner turmoil, King moved to the seat beside me and reached for my hand. He laced his fingers through mine and brought our joined hands up to his mouth, pressing a kiss to my knuckles.

“Everything will work out the way it’s supposed to,” he said.

I nodded, unable to speak with the small display of affection he was showing me—that East was trying and failing miserably not to notice.

“What about when we graduate?” East said out of the blue. “No one can say shit if none of us are at Astor anymore.”

I looked at King to gauge his reaction, and he shook his head once. “It’s probably not a smart idea.”

“Whoever said we needed to be smart?”

“*I* always have to be smart. And think ahead.”

East clamped his mouth shut, clearly getting the message, but then he couldn’t seem to help himself. “So this week was you thinking ahead, huh?”

King lowered our hands and pulled his arm back from mine. “I wasn’t thinking with any part of my head this week.” He paused. “Not the one on my shoulders, anyway.”

“Do you regret it?” The words were out of my mouth before I even realized I was going to say them, and now I wasn’t sure I wanted the answer.

King settled back into his seat beside East and shook his head. “Not a second of it.”

I wasn’t sure if that made me feel better or worse. Now that I’d had this time with them, I didn’t know how I was supposed to just forget about it.

“Me either,” East said, eyeing me with a cheeky grin. “Especially knowing that tan of yours is *all* over now. Whenever I look at you back at Astor, I’m going to think about you lying under the sun working on those hard-to-reach tan lines.”

I chuckled, East’s words somehow managing to break through the clouds that had started to roll in with my mood. “Well, whenever I see *you*, I’m going to remember how nice it was to have someone other than me be able to shut you up.”

East’s eyes shifted to King’s lap, and he licked his lips. “Me too.”

I kicked his foot. “I meant in general, not with—”

“His delicious cock?”

King and I both shook our head at his utter absurdity, but again, it was nice to be distracted from the inevitable.

I glanced at the watch King had put back on after leaving it off for a week.

Eight fifteen p.m.

T-minus thirty minutes until reality set back in, and our time in Wonderland was over.

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THIRTY-SIX

east

IT WASN'T THE Phantom that picked us up from the airport but a blacked-out SUV, though it was still King's personal driver that loaded our bags into the trunk.

"I knew it," I said, winking at King as we settled into the back seat. "You rented the Phantom."

"It comes out for special occasions, but I prefer to be inconspicuous in the day-to-day." He returned my wink. "I am just a professor, after all."

Behind me, Zac snorted out a laugh. "Understatement of the century."

As we pulled out of Teterboro and headed toward the city, I reached for my phone and powered it on. When I realized it would be worthless while I was gone, I'd turned it off and shoved it in my bag, and I could only imagine how many "I'm so bored" messages West had sent during his trip.

I chuckled to myself just thinking about the stories he and the other guys would have about their supposed romantic getaways. They'd all be begging me to plan the next trip and apologizing for being idiots.

Then again, their being idiots was the reason I'd just spent the most incredible week with two men who were supposed to be off-limits.

I loved my life.

"Jesus, East," Zac said as he watched the notifications light up my phone one after the other. They were never-ending, the way I imagined King's would be once he turned his cell on.

"My friends regretting their poor decisions, no doubt." But when I swiped my thumb over the screen to see the damage, the sheer amount of missed calls and messages was jarring, even for me.

As I scrolled through, several more popped up, not just from my friends, but my mom, and quite a few others I wasn't in regular contact with. "Fuckin' hell, what's the emergency? I was only gone for a week."

I opened up the most recent one from West first.

WEST:
East, you need to call me.
Where the hell are you?
Why are you not answering?
Wherever you are, stay there. Don't come home.

"'Don't come home'? What's he talking about?"

King's head jerked in my direction. "What happened?"

I shrugged and hit West's number. "I don't know. He just sent me a bunch of—"

West picked up on the first ring. "Fuck, East, are you alive? Why haven't you been answering any of our calls?"

"I missed you too. Actually, I take that back. I didn't miss you at all—"

"Shit, you don't know, do you?"

"Know what? You sound like a drama queen."

"About your dad, East. He got arrested."

I blinked, not sure I'd heard him right. "Say that again?"

"They arrested your dad Friday night. Your mom's been trying to get a hold of you—"

"Arrested him for what? What are you talking about?"

"So much shit. Fraud, tax evasion, falsifying records. It's all over the news, like front-page shit. They seized all his assets and set his bail so high he's still behind bars."

All the blood drained out of my body. I didn't think I was even still breathing as the phone fell from my hand and hit the floor.

"East, what's wrong?" Zac put his hand on my arm as King picked up my phone and hit speaker. West was still talking, but all I heard was "reporters fucking everywhere." I couldn't speak, couldn't even think, as Zac asked, "Where?"

"At the Towers," West said, not catching that it wasn't me responding. "So you can't come back here. Tell me where you are and I'll come get—"

King ended the call and turned the phone off before he pulled out his own and began to type.

“Why’d you do that?” I demanded as he tucked my phone into the inner pocket of his jacket.

“It’s best you stay off your phone for the moment.”

“Best for fucking who?” I lunged for him. “Give it back.”

King caught my wrist in a firm hold and leveled me with one of those no-nonsense stares. “No. You don’t know who might’ve hacked your phone. Who might be listening in to any calls you make. You’ve been off the grid until this very minute. You turn that phone on right now and you’re opening the door to anyone with slightly better than average tech skills. Not to mention the authorities. Think.”

That was pretty hard to do when my world had just exploded right before my very eyes.

“What’s going on?” Zac said.

“You need to trust me.” King’s focus and grip didn’t let up.

“Did you know?” What, exactly, I had no clue. But for some reason I felt he knew more than he was letting on.

A suspicion that was soon confirmed when he let go of me and lowered his eyes back to his phone.

“I asked you a question,” I said. “Did you *know*?”

King took in a deep breath, and like a mask had been slipped back on, the relaxed man I’d spent the last week with vanished and I found myself staring at the leader he’d revealed himself to be.

“I’d heard rumblings. We all have for years now.”

“Rumblings about what?”

“Your father and his…business practices.”

I shook my head, trying to make sense of what he was telling me, but nothing seemed to fit. He’d heard *things*? What kinds of things? And if this had been going on for years, how was my father still conducting business in one of the most influential cities in the world?

“This is bullshit.” My molars threatened to crack with how hard I was grinding them. “My father… He’s a shark, yeah, but you have to be in New York. Especially in the business he’s in.”

“That’s all true, but—”

“I don’t believe you. Believe any of this.” My hands shook as I ran them through my hair, and a comforting hand on my shoulder made me flinch.

“Sorry,” Zac said, his voice quiet, almost pitying, and I spun around to aim and fire, until the second our eyes met.

Where I expected to see pity, I saw compassion, and when he ran a hand down my arm this time, I nodded. “Thanks.”

I spun back to look out the window, refusing to look at the stoic man in the seat beside me. God knew what King was thinking as he typed away on his phone. Hell, *I* didn’t even know what to think. I didn’t know what to do.

My father had been arrested.

Fucking *arrested*.

I had no idea what that meant for me and my mother. What that meant for my future. If all my father’s assets had been seized, did that mean we were…broke?

I rubbed my hands over my face, trying to work out what to do next, where to go. If I couldn’t go back to the Towers and I had no fucking money, what now?

“I need my phone.”

King stopped typing to look at me. “I told you, no.”

“And I’m telling you I *need* it.”

“What you *need* is somewhere safe to go. Somewhere away from prying eyes and nosy reporters.”

“And how the hell do you think I’m going to be able to organize that *without my fucking phone*?”

“East, maybe you should try to calm down for a minute. King is only trying to—”

“Don’t, Zac.” I held up my hand. “This is my life that’s being fucked over right now. My world that has just gone to hell in a handbasket. I need to find out what happened, talk to my mother, make arrangements on where the hell I’m going to live—since *apparently* my place is off-limits. So please, *do not tell me to calm down*.”

My body vibrated with misdirected fury, but since my father wasn’t around to yell at, Zac and King were the unlucky recipients.

“Jorge, change of plans,” King said to his driver, his demeanor infuriatingly calm. “Let’s head to the house.”

He then turned and said, “You’re coming home with me.”

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THIRTY-SEVEN

king

THE DECISION TO bring East and Zac back to my place had been an easy one. Not one that I'd made lightly, but one I'd made the second I heard what had happened to East's father.

Niles Easton's arrest was now the hottest gossip to hit New York's business and social scene in years, and that meant it was open season on anyone connected to him. Including his high-profile son, who would be the easiest way to gain access to the fallen real estate mogul. Something I wouldn't let happen—not on my fucking watch.

"I'm not coming home with you." East's natural instinct to fight me at every turn was in full swing as he grappled for some kind of control in this uncontrollable situation he found himself in.

"Do you have a better idea?"

"I might if you give me my—"

"No. It's too risky. I know you want to call your mother, to find out what's going on. I can give you that. But not here. Not on this phone." I put a hand over the lapel of my jacket. "Let me help you."

East looked away from me, back out the window, but his silence was answer enough.

Jorge continued our drive through the streets of Manhattan, the city lights a stark contrast to the islands' twinkling starlight as he made his way through the busy streets and headed down the Upper West Side, where Zac's place was.

As we approached his turnoff, I glanced over my shoulder to see him sitting quietly in his seat, his eyes fixed on the back of East's head, a

worried expression etched across his features.

"Zac?"

He looked my way, and the concern in his eyes spoke volumes on how much he cared for East despite their "casual" arrangement.

"Would you like me to drop you home, or—"

"I'd like to come with you, if that's okay? But if you'd rather I didn't, I—"

"It's okay with me if East is fine with it."

East gave a clipped nod, but the sigh that followed seemed full of relief. *Interesting.* The idea of Zac's coming with us was a source of comfort he hadn't known he'd been waiting for. The tension in his body eased somewhat as we finally pulled into a nondescript driveway with a garage door. It opened the second Jorge pulled up in front of it, and when he drove us inside, it shut behind us.

"You have a *garage* in Manhattan?" East asked.

"No," I said as the whirring sound of machinery started, and the floor below us began to move up. "I have a personal car elevator."

"A what?" Zac said. "Are you kidding me?"

The elevator came to a stop in under sixty seconds in a car space that had some of the most impressive views of New York City.

"Holy shit…" East said as he reached for the handle of the car, but then stopped. "Is it safe to get out?"

I nodded, pleased that for a second he'd forgotten the shitstorm that had brought him to this spot. "Yes, it's safe to get out. It's essentially a garage—"

"In the fucking sky."

"That's right—it adjoins directly with my place."

East shook his head and shoved open the door, mumbling, "A fucking Batcave, that's what this is."

"It helps with privacy."

"Right."

"Still want to stay?" I asked Zac. I'd understand if he didn't. He'd had a lot thrown at him over the last two weeks. A lot to digest about someone he thought he knew. But I found myself hoping he'd be curious enough to at least get out of the car. "Jorge can take you home if you'd rather not."

"That's not it." Zac turned to look out the window at East staring down at the city. "I'm just not sure how I can help or what I'm doing here."

“Just being here with him helps,” I said as the door that led into my penthouse opened, and I nodded for him to follow. “Trust me.”

We stepped into the sky vault, a glass-enclosed space that also served as a stairwell into the main living area, and East followed. I led them up the stairs and caught a glimpse of their reflections. East’s brows were pulled together pensively, and I felt the need to reassure him.

“I’ve got a secure line for you to call who you need to.”

“You think I know their numbers off the top of my head?”

That showed the gap between our generations. I could still rattle off the numbers of those closest to me, but no one had to memorize anything these days.

Shit, was this what it was like to feel old?

“Tell me who you need and I’ll get it for you,” I said.

“Just like that?”

“Just like that.”

“Okay.” East rubbed a tired hand over his face and sighed. “Maybe just West and my mother.”

“Done.” I left him with Zac, both of them standing by the windows that overlooked the Hudson River, and reached out to just the person who could get those numbers in a heartbeat and secure the other side of the connections. East wasn’t the only one who had people with information at their fingertips.

I came back with a slip of paper and the secured cell in my palm to find Zac had managed to pull East into a hug, holding him tightly even though East’s arms were still crossed over his chest like that was keeping his emotions in check.

Not wanting to interrupt the moment, I watched them from the doorway until Zac looked up and saw me.

“You have free rein of the house, so take your time, and if you need anything, let us know,” I said, handing everything over to East.

He looked down at the numbers I’d written and ran his finger over the paper. “Thank you.”

Zac dropped his arms from East and took a step back, giving him some space, and East turned to walk out of the room. Zac watched him until it was clear he was out of earshot and then blew out a breath. “What the hell is happening?”

I pulled out my phone, tapped the screen, and handed it over to Zac to let him read one of the articles himself.

The situation was bad. I wouldn't sugarcoat it. Niles Easton was in a shit-ton of trouble that his wallet wouldn't be able to get him out of. It was clear from East's reaction that whatever business dealings his father had, he hadn't been privy to those, otherwise none of this would come as much of a shock.

But he'd been assuming he'd take his father's place, at least by his side before his old man retired, so had Niles really only shown his son the façade of what he'd be running?

"Shit." Zac ran a hand over his jaw and shook his head. "Seized assets? Like…?"

"Property. Money. Personal belongings."

"Oh my God." He started to pace, glancing back at the doorway East had disappeared through. "So, what, they lose it all? Even East and his mom?"

I nodded. "Everything that could've been obtained illegally or through funds received illegally."

"What if they didn't know?"

"Doesn't matter."

Zac stopped moving. "This is gonna kill him, King. What's he going to do?" He didn't wait for an answer before his eyes narrowed slightly behind his glasses. "Wait, *did* you know?"

"No. Like I said, there have been rumors for years, but I didn't have any reason to look into what he was doing."

"But if you were considering East for recruitment for whatever this is, you would've. Right? I can't imagine you got to where you are without finding out every little detail of the people you surround yourself with."

That keen mind was exactly why Zac had piqued my interest in the first place. "You're right. I planned on having my team do a deep dive when we returned. But one thing I want to make clear is that I'd never punish someone for the sins of others. East is his own person. I trust he'll make his own decisions that don't align with those of his father."

Zac took my measure, tilting his head in a way where I could practically see the wheels turning. "My mom always said no one becomes a billionaire by playing entirely by the rules. Is that true?"

"It might be."

“King.”

“Yes. But the number one rule is, don’t get caught.”

He was quiet as he let that sink in, reading between the lines—probably deciding whether he should even stay another minute in my home or if he should cut ties and get out now. And though I’d give him that freedom if he chose, I found myself hoping he’d make a different choice. That he’d stay.

It felt like a lifetime of silence as we stood there with the truth between us, but then he finally lifted his head. “Do you think East is going to be okay?”

“I do. He’s tenacious, driven, and isn’t willing to accept anything other than greatness for himself. For that reason alone, he’ll survive. But he has to admit he *will* need help, and despite what you think, you are a source of comfort for him.”

“So are you.”

“Well, it looks like we have our work cut out for us, doesn’t it?”

Zac looked in the direction East had disappeared to, a thoughtful expression on his face. “And at school?”

I’d known it would come up, the fact we were all due back at Astor tomorrow morning, but that was a problem for then, not now.

“How about we focus on one thing at a time? You go check on East while I get some food delivered. You two have to be hungry.”

Zac nodded and started off in the direction East had gone, but before he got too far he stopped and looked back at me, those blue eyes seeing way more than I should’ve let him.

“Making good life choices tonight, are we, professor?”

My words from the day I’d caught him and East sneaking out of an empty room had never felt more appropriate. But as he turned and walked out the door, I realized that from the moment they confessed to wanting me, I’d never actually had a choice.

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THIRTY-EIGHT

east

“OH, JAMES, IT was dreadful,” my mother said, barely giving me a hello before she started the retelling of what had gone down. “There I was, having high tea in the parlor with the ladies from the Partridge Historical Society when all of a sudden, dozens of men burst inside. They broke down the door dressed all in black. Guns drawn and pointed at us like we were criminals. *Criminals*, James. They were shouting, the ladies were screaming, and Miss Faye fell right over and nearly smacked her head on the Boca Do Lobo table. Can you imagine? If she’d been concussed right there on the parquet floor?”

“I don’t care about Miss Faye, Mother; I care about my father. You know, the one who was arrested?”

“Of course I know, I was there. It was the most terrifying ordeal, you just couldn’t imagine. Your poor father in handcuffs…” Her breath hitched like a fresh wave of tears was imminent. “And all the society ladies saw what happened—”

“Who gives a shit what they saw? Why hasn’t he been bailed out yet?”

“Darling, it’s not possible on a weekend. Those horrible people waited until late Friday so he’d have to stay. Your poor father…wearing that same suit for several days—”

“I’m sure they gave him something more comfortable to wear.” *Something orange and ill-fitting.* My head began to throb, and I rubbed my thumb over the space between my eyes. “So what does all this mean? They’ve frozen all our accounts? We can’t go home? What the hell do we do?”

“James, it doesn’t become you to be hysterical.”

“No, that’s your job,” I muttered. If she heard me, she pretended not to notice. “Can you give me something here?”

“For the time being, perhaps allow your friends to pick up the tab on any of your excursions. Just until we get this silly situation sorted out.”

Excursions? *Silly situation*? Was she hearing herself?

I put her on speaker and pulled up one of the articles on the screen. “I’m reading this shit right now. This isn't some accidental arrest—these are serious charges. If he really did all this, he’s going to prison, do you understand that? And not just for six months or a year. He could go for *life*.”

She broke out into a long wail, and I had to take her off speaker so King and Zac didn’t come running thinking I’d decided to jump out of the window.

“I can’t be married to a felon,” she said, sniffling. “He’ll ruin us all. Our good name, just dragged through the mud. What will everyone think?”

“Why are you more concerned with what your friends think than what Father did? Or did you know what was happening?”

“Of course I didn’t know.”

“You sure about that? Because if you did, they’ll find out. I’ll have two parents in federal prison—”

She wailed even louder, and I had to pull the phone away from my ear. God, this was going nowhere. I’d always rolled my eyes when one of my friends claimed I had my priorities all out of whack, but they hadn’t met my parents—who, up until now, I’d thought were smart, sensible people who enjoyed the finer things life had to offer.

“You know what, Mother, I’ve got to go,” I said. “I’ll call you tomorrow.”

Before she could respond, I ended the call. Tempted as I was to throw the damn phone, I refrained, but only because it wasn’t mine.

What a mess. A felon father who was going to rot in prison. A mother who was focused on how bad this all made her look. And no real answers.

Oh, other than to let my friends pay for shit.

There couldn’t be anything more horrifying in the world than the thought of a denied credit card. It made the bile rise in my throat until I thought I’d—

“East?” Zac stood in the doorway, a dirty martini in hand. “We thought you could use one of these.”

Alcohol. Thank fuck. I could've kissed him in that moment. Actually…

I walked over to where he stood, a cautious look on his face, took the drink from him, then reached for the back of his neck and pulled him in to take what I wanted—no, *needed*—in that moment.

Zac stumbled forward a step, caught off guard, but the second my tongue slid across the seam of his lips, he parted for me.

"Thank you," I said, letting him go, then I took a sip of the drink and let out a sigh of pleasure. "This is perfect."

"I'd love to take credit for it, but that's all King."

I should've known. I couldn't remember Zac ever making me drinks before, but King knew his way around a bar, and why wouldn't he? He had, like, ten on his island resort.

"Did you get in contact with your mom?"

"Unfortunately." I shook my head and headed back down the hall. After that horrid conversation with my mother, I felt the need to find somewhere more at home for me to call West. Somewhere familiar. Somewhere I did my best thinking.

I passed by several seating areas, some of which had *open* windows—probably not the smartest place for me to stand right now, with how I was feeling—and kept right on until I found exactly what I was looking for.

A beautiful bedroom with a king-sized bed overlooking the Hudson River beckoned me inside. But it wasn't the soft duvet and hundreds of pillows calling my name. No, that would be the room connected to it that I knew would be just as high end.

"Do you want to get some sleep?" Zac asked as I made my way inside, taking in the expensive artwork hanging on the walls. I couldn't help but admire King's taste. The guy had just spent the week with me and Zac, so of course he had stellar taste. But this showed a whole other side to him.

"Nope. Couldn't sleep now even if I wanted to."

"Then what are we…" Zac's question drifted off as I wandered through a wide-open doorway, and there it was, my very own marble temple. "Oh, you want to take a bath? Okay, let me get out of the— Wait, what are you doing?"

I climbed into the huge soaker tub by an enormous floor-to-ceiling window and leaned back against the end, martini in hand. I closed my eyes, and my mind started to calm as the cool stone soothed my soul.

"Um, East?"

“Hmm?”

“You’re still wearing your clothes.”

I opened one eye and took in the confusion on Zac’s face. “And that’s strange because…?”

“You’re sitting in a bathtub.”

“I know.” I took a long sip of my martini, enjoying the smooth slide of whatever high-end vodka King had put in it. “This is where I do my best thinking.”

“In the bathtub?”

“Yes.”

“But without actually taking a bath?”

“Again, yes. There’s just something so comforting about how the stone feels around me.”

“Like a tomb?”

I snorted, and Zac’s lips twitched. I guess it was a little strange to take comfort this way. But could anyone blame me? It wasn’t as if my mother was the warmest woman in the world. So this was like a maternal hug of sorts.

“I need to call West,” I said, knowing that Zac wouldn’t want to stick around for that, and just as suspected, he went to leave the bathroom. “Zac?”

He stopped in the doorway and turned back to look at me.

“You’re going to stay, right?”

“The night?”

“Just…until whenever.”

A small smile tugged at his lips, and my chest tightened. Jesus, with all this shit going on with my father, was I about to have a heart attack?

“Yeah, I can stay.”

“Good, okay.” I held the phone up, and when he turned and left without another word, I reached for the paper King had given me and entered West’s number. Then at the last second hit the video feature so I could see his ugly mug.

It barely had time to connect before he answered, and when his familiar face came onto the screen, a wave of relief washed over me.

“East,” West shouted as he moved out of our apartment’s kitchen and into his room. “Fuckin’ hell, man, I’ve been going out of my mind worrying

about your punk ass. Why'd you hang up on me? Then your phone's going straight to voicemail. Where are you?"

"In my defense, *I* didn't hang up on you." I took a sip of my perfectly dirty martini and hoped King was already making another.

Someone grabbed the phone from West, and a few seconds later Travis's face filled the screen. "Oh good, you're in the tub. For a second I was worried you'd be overreacting somewhere."

"Aw, you were worried about me? That's cute."

Travis was pushed off screen suddenly, replaced with Donovan, Preston, and Gavin squeezing their faces in.

"Are you okay? Do you need a Van talk?" Donovan asked.

"We're here for you, East," Preston added. "Whatever you need."

I held up my half-empty glass. "I could do with another drink."

"I already called Scotty and told him to come early so we could pick you up wherever you are." Gavin frowned, and his shock of platinum hair moved closer to the screen like he was trying to see what was inside it. "Wait, where are you?"

"Tell him not to bother. I'm not going."

Travis stole the phone back. "What do you mean you're not going?"

"If reporters are all over the Towers, you don't think they'll be crawling up Astor's gates too? Come on, Trav. They're not getting a shot at my glorious face without coughing up the money for my father's bail."

"I could take care of it," Daire said somewhere off camera.

"We've met the quota on arrests this week, but thanks." I slid an olive down the swizzle stick and into my mouth.

"All right, all right, give me the phone back." West took one look at me, then said to the others, "Give us a sec."

There were grumbles as the guys all left West's room, and when they were gone, he flipped the lock and sat on his bed. "Obviously you've got everyone's support. We've all got your back, East."

"If you didn't, I'd have to pay for new friends. Oh, wait. I can't. Never mind." I bit off the remaining olive and tossed the swizzle stick in the direction of the trash can, missing entirely.

"It's okay if you wanna vent. This is shit, the whole thing."

Yes, yes it was. The events of the last hour hadn't quite penetrated my brain, and the vodka was doing a decent job of cushioning the blow. Before

I went fully into shock, there *were* a couple of things I needed to clear the air on, though bringing them up made me want to find that open window.

"I suppose there's a little issue that needs to be worked out," I said. "Apparently, these morons have frozen our accounts, which means—"

"Don't worry about that," West cut in. "You'll always have a place at the Towers, and whatever you need, I've got you. Seriously."

I swallowed around the lump in my throat, thankful he didn't make me say the words "I'm a penniless asshole, can you spare some change?" because my God, I didn't think I could force that shit out even if I was destitute.

"Well, we'll be back on our feet before you know it," I said, waving my hand like none of this much mattered and it was all a mistake.

My twisted-to-hell stomach knew better.

"I know you will." West nodded, buying into the lie we both knew that it was. "Just like I know you're upset and trying not to show it. But you're allowed to be pissed about this. You trusted your dad and he let you the down."

Yeah, in the most monumental way ever.

It was no secret my father was a cutthroat businessman. One didn't get to the top without stepping on a few people to get there—or, you know, destroying them. But I'd always assumed he'd done it in a way that was legal, that he was the smart, savvy type, not the low-down, underhanded, cheating type.

Turned out I didn't know anything at all. Which I supposed was a blessing in this particular instance. Otherwise I might be modeling the latest shade of orange too.

"I don't know what to feel right now. I'm still trying to wrap my head around the fact my father is currently sitting in a jail cell."

"I get it, man." West ran a hand through his hair. "We tried to get a hold of you Friday but we couldn't reach you and—actually, why *couldn't* we reach you? You never said."

How did you tell your best friend that you'd been whisked away to a private island so you could have hot sex with the most intimidating professor to walk the halls of Astor? Oh and that his TA had come too.

"I was out of town."

"Well, I gathered that, but you don't usually go MIA. Is it because I was with the dean?"

“No. If you want to spend time with the most boring faculty member of Astor, that’s on you. *I* didn’t call because I was busy getting schooled by the *hottest* member of Astor’s faculty.”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

West’s confusion was a delightful little reprieve to this shit-tastic homecoming, so I decided to distract myself with it.

“Let’s just say I spent this past week serving a king…and his TA.”

One second… Two seconds… Three—

“Are you fucking with me right now?”

“Sorry, no. It takes all my energy to fuck around with the two I’ve been playing with this week. You’ll have to get Golden Boy to do that.”

“King? As in Professor Hardass?”

“One and the same, and I am delighted to confirm he does indeed have a hard ass—and cock.”

West stared at me with a look of complete and utter bewilderment on his face. “But how? When? And his TA? You mean Zac? You two hate each other.”

It was true. We had…until fairly recently.

“As much as I’d like to get into this, I kind of have a lot going on right now. So if we could keep this on the down-low, one scandal at a time is about all I can handle.”

“That’s what you used to say about cocks, too.”

“Touché.”

“Fuckin’ hell, East. I don’t know what to say.”

Now that was a first.

“But don’t think I’m not going to ask a million questions when shit settles down.”

“I’d expect nothing less. But right now, I need to go and get myself another martini.”

“Wait, so, are you…with them now?”

I wasn’t sure exactly how much to reveal, so I merely shrugged and said, “I’ll call you again soon.”

“I can’t call you?”

“No phone, remember?”

“Oh yeah—well, just know I’m here if you need anything.”

“I know.” And I did. West was the best friend a guy could have. The kind you knew you could count on under any circumstance, and I’d given

him plenty to bail from. But he never had. He'd always pulled through, always been there. Just like he knew I would be for him. "Thanks, West."

"No problem. See you soon."

"See you."

I ended the call and lay there in the quiet of the bathroom for a minute, letting my new reality set in. But when the noise in my head started up again, I decided it might not be so smart to sit there by myself wallowing, where I might be tempted to fill the tub and drown out the noise.

Instead, I decided to go and track down the other two in the house, shocked to realize that—for the first time in my life—I'd rather have human comfort over an empty bathtub's solitary embrace.

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THIRTY-NINE

zac

IT'D BEEN TWO days back at Astor, and East was still lying low, refusing to leave King's penthouse. I couldn't blame him, given the crowd of photographers and news trucks out on the sidewalks just waiting to bombard him with questions. I wouldn't want to deal with that either. But with only a few weeks left of classes, he couldn't miss out on much more or he'd be in danger of not graduating.

It was a good thing he'd been given sanctuary at King's place, though, because no one even knew he was there. The same couldn't be said for his friends, who had to dodge their own set of questions every time the Sprinter van dropped them off at the gates. I didn't know any of them well, but I appreciated the way they refused to give up information about East or his family. Not to mention the tall, broody one had a scowl that made the press back off that much quicker.

"Yo, Zac." I was heading to my next class when West jogged after me. The only interaction we usually had was when I was giving East a hard time, so even though I stopped, curious what he wanted, I was right back in TA mode.

I arched a brow. "Can I help you?"

"'*Can I help you?*' So proper." West smirked, and it was easy to see why he and East were such good friends. They were both little shits. "Yes, actually, you can."

He lowered his bag and unzipped it, only to pull out another bag, this one soft leather and packed full.

"You come bearing gifts?" I said. "No thank you."

West glanced around us and lowered his voice. “It’s not for you—it’s for East.”

I reared back in surprise. East? Why would he be giving me something for him? I was under the impression he hadn’t told any of his friends about me.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said, on the off chance he was trying to suss me out and didn’t really know the truth. East liked his secrets, and I wasn’t about to give them up, even to his best friend.

West rolled his eyes. “For fuck’s sake, I know about you and King. No one else does, and it’s probably better that it stays that way for now.”

Shit. “I see.”

He shoved the bag into my arms. “This is some of East’s things that I thought he might want until he comes home. Make sure he gets it.”

“He’ll get it.”

“Good.” He narrowed his sky-blue eyes like there was more he wanted to say but wasn’t sure this was the right time or place to do it. He started to turn on his heel, but his “fuck it” switch must’ve flipped on, because he faced me again and added, “Just so you’re aware, East keeps his circle tight. The fact that he’s chosen you in this moment to be with him? It means something. You fuck with that, you fuck with all of us. You got me?”

I shouldered the bag and nodded, secretly glad East had people in his life who cared about him enough to stand up for him. “Got it,” I said, before correcting myself. “I’ve got *him*.”

West continued to stare me down, but I stood toe to toe with him, unblinking. “You better.”

“I do. And so does King.”

The mention of our professor had his forehead creasing. No doubt he had a million questions about that one. About all three of us, really, but he must’ve realized I wasn’t the one he should ask about all those details. West gave a curt nod and backed away, holding my stare until he rounded the corner.

None of those princes were my favorite people, but I could respect their loyalty. Admired it, even. Though that was the last compliment I’d ever direct their way.

AT THE END of the day, I grabbed East’s bag from where I’d stashed it in King’s office, and then walked to the end of the block, where an unmarked

car sat on the corner to pick me up. Since we couldn't exactly be seen leaving campus together, King had left earlier. I was supposed to be back at work tonight, but I had time to make a pit stop at his place first if the traffic wasn't too bad.

Could I have sent East's things with King instead of doing it myself? Yes. But selfishly, I wanted to see East and make sure he was okay. He'd still been sleeping when I left King's this morning, and I hadn't wanted to wake him. The fact that he was stubbornly choosing to sleep alone even as he wanted us both near was frustrating, but East did things in his own time. Maybe he was doing better today.

After everything that had happened with East since our return, the conversation we'd had in the car about going our separate ways became irrelevant. There was no way King or I were going to walk away from East now, or each other. We hadn't said the words out loud, but we'd fallen into the same relationship we'd enjoyed on the island when we were within the walls of the penthouse, while keeping to our strict roles outside of it.

One glance at King's expression when I found them at his private pool told me today wasn't the day East snapped out of it. King stood at the edge near the shallow end, watching as East swam laps at a furious pace.

"Has he come up for air yet?" I set East's bag on a chair and went over to King, free now to greet him the way I wanted to—a kiss to those full lips.

"Once," King said, turning back to the pool. "But as soon as I wanted to talk, he disappeared underwater and hasn't stopped since."

"That isn't good."

"No. It's not." He crouched as East approached us again, then reached down and grabbed hold of East's hand.

East came to an abrupt stop, lifting his head from the water with a slight sputter as he glared up at King. "What the hell?"

If King was intimidated by East's caustic tone, he didn't show it. "Out. Now."

East went to pull his arm down, but King merely shook his head.

"Don't even think about it."

East's eyes flicked to mine, and all I could do was shrug. "You want me out, you need to let me go."

King released his hold, and just when I thought East would push off the wall and head back in the direction of the deep end, he placed his hands on

the edge of the pool and hoisted himself out of it.

With everything that was going on, it was hardly the time to take note of the tiny black swim shorts he wore, but when they clung to his wet body like a second skin, it was difficult to look elsewhere.

Something he was clearly aware of as he walked up to King, not stopping until they were toe to toe.

“Well, I’m out,” East said, angling his chin up in defiance. “What would you like me to do next, *professor*?”

King ran his eyes down over that gorgeous body, and while it was obvious East thought he could distract him with sex, King knew him too well to fall for that tactic now. He reached for East’s chin and leaned down until their lips were barely a whisper apart.

“To talk.”

East yanked his face free. “What do you want to talk about?” He shoved past us and over to where he’d thrown his towel across the end of a lounger. “The fact that my father ruined his life and my future? Sure. Let’s make a drink and send up a cheers.”

“You know that’s not what King means.”

“No?” East looked between us, the towel frozen against his chest. “How about the fact that I have no idea where my mother or I will be living in the foreseeable future? And school, what about school? Who’s going to pay for that?”

“James—” King started, but East held up a hand.

“No, you wanted to talk, and these are the questions that need to be answered. And let’s not forget the trial of the decade that will no doubt take place here in the city. Will I be called for that? Will I be grilled in front of the entire world for the horrible fucking decisions my father has made? Probably. Let’s see… Did I miss anything?”

East went back to rigorously toweling himself off, and I took hold of King’s arm and mouthed, *Let me.* He nodded, and as I brushed by him, I felt his fingers trail the back of my arm in a silent show of support.

I reached out a careful hand, halting East’s movements and curling my fingers around his. When East brought his eyes up to mine, I noticed the dark circles under them, confirming what I already knew—he wasn’t sleeping for shit. That needed to change, even if King and I had to tie him to the mattress and slip him a sedative.

“No one is expecting you to be okay with everything going on right now, especially not us,” I said, taking the towel from him and pulling him in close. “We just want you to talk to us and let us try to help you.”

King took the towel from me and moved around behind East.

“How can you help me?” East asked, the sarcasm from moments ago gone now, his hazel eyes imploring.

“By being here for you.” King wrapped the towel around East’s shoulders and put his lips by his ear. “But you have to let us in to do that. You have to let down these walls of yours. Stop fighting us, little prince.”

“I don’t know how…” East whispered as he leaned back into King’s hold. The sheer exhaustion from nights of no sleep and a busy brain were finally catching up with him.

“Let us take care of you,” I said, bringing his hand up to my chest. “Let us do what I promised your friend we would.”

“West?”

“He threatened my life if I didn’t look after you.”

“So that’s why you’re doing this?”

“No.” I leaned in to kiss his cheek. “I’m doing this because I care.”

East stiffened, but I was done pretending to be indifferent. Done pretending that this arrogant, pompous, infuriatingly *gorgeous* man hadn’t somehow crept into my heart.

“*We* care.” King reached over East’s shoulder to stroke his fingers down my cheek, a soft, approving look in his eyes. “You need to come back to school, James. That’s the first step.” He took East’s shoulders and turned him around so he could look him in the eye. “I’ve made sure the press will be nowhere near Astor, and anything else that’s worrying you, we can deal with, together. Everything has a solution, and we’ll help you find it. But you have to start looking after yourself.”

East gave a slow nod and reached back for my hand. “Okay. Does that mean no martinis for dinner?”

King chuckled and winked at the two of us. “How about a compromise? Martinis *with* dinner.”

“I can do that.”

“And tonight, you sleep with us.”

“Just sleep?”

“Yes. But if you’re a good boy, we may not sleep as much the next night.”

“Deal.”

“Good, now get inside so we can get some food in you.” King swatted him on the ass, and as East headed for the door, I looked over to see King watching him go.

“He’s more difficult to ignore than you’d expect, isn’t he?” I said, already thinking up an excuse to skip out on work so I could stay.

“That’s one way to put it.”

“And another?”

“Maybe he’s not the only one who thrives on a challenge.”

Truer words had never been spoken. But who would’ve guessed we’d all end up being each other’s greatest challenge of all?

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FORTY

zac

ARRIVING AT ASTOR the next day was a completely different scene from the prior two days. With King taking care of the situation behind the scenes, the entire campus, as well as the Waldorf Towers, was now a no-press zone, which meant the media couldn't get anywhere near close enough to harass East or his friends. Cops were stationed at frequent intervals to enforce the new boundaries, which made everything a lot quieter walking in that morning—and a lot more surreal.

I hated that I had a meeting all the TAs were required to attend early that morning, or I would've liked to be there with East when he arrived. But King had taken care of that too, making sure the driver who usually chauffeured the princes around in their Sprinter—Scotty, maybe?—had picked up East first before stopping at the Towers for the rest of his crew. The last thing King needed was all of those guys finding out about him or where he lived. Even though West had claimed he wouldn't say anything to the others, it was only a matter of time before he spilled what he knew. I doubted that group kept secrets from each other for long.

"Why don't you leave all that for now?" King said when I dropped my folder for the third time in a matter of minutes. He pushed his chair back from his desk, giving his sole focus to where I worked steadily at my own station, or was trying to. I was just distracted. I kept glancing at the clock and wondering if East had made it here, if anyone had bothered him, if he was upset or working through things a little better, if he'd heard anything else about his father now that he'd apparently made bail.

“Zac?” King said. “He should be here anytime. Why don’t you go check on him?”

“No, I don’t need to do that. I’m sure he’s fine.” I would’ve sent him a text to make sure, but King still had East’s phone, unconvinced it was a good time to give it back.

He stood and came around his desk, stopping by mine. “Go. It’ll make us *both* feel better.”

“You too, huh?”

King brushed his thumb over my lips. “Yes, me too.”

Knowing I wasn’t the only irrational one in the room made me wish I could wrap my arms around King and give him the kiss I wanted to. It was only our location that stopped me, and that was when I realized how dangerous it was to blur the lines of whatever this relationship happening between the three of us was.

None of us were ready for any of this to end. Not yet.

I set my work aside and started across the room, but then King cleared his throat behind me. When I turned around, he put one hand on the closed door and brought the other up to cup my face. Then he lowered his mouth down on mine, and every fiber in my body came alive. Now *this* was straight out of a direct fantasy of mine, because how many times had I imagined him kissing me in this very office? Too many to count, but it had been worth the wait. King was hungry but restrained, given that we couldn’t take things further. Leaving it there only ramped up anticipation, though we were missing a certain someone who would make this moment complete.

King stole another kiss and then stepped back. “Tell East to stop by my office today. I’d like to see him.”

Translation: he was just as concerned and wanted to see with his own eyes that East was all in one piece.

“I’ll tell him. Try not to stress, professor.”

“Go check on our prince.”

I aimed a wink at him and slipped out of the office, more determined than ever to track down East and make sure he’d arrived safely.

It wasn’t too difficult to find him. The rumor mill was in full swing as I headed through the halls of Astor, with news of the most notorious prince having finally shown his face after his father’s downfall.

It took everything I had not to turn on each and every one of the gossipmongers and tell them to shut the fuck up, but that wasn’t exactly the

conduct someone in my position could engage in with no repercussions. So I bit my tongue and searched out the head of dark hair that was always so perfectly styled, and that included his clothes. Some of which West had packed tightly into the bag that had East about to stroke out when he saw how wrinkled they were.

Not that you could tell this morning. If I hadn't seen the dark circles under his eyes for myself last night, I wouldn't have guessed anything was wrong. He was just as put together as he usually was, surrounded by his friends like a protective circle no one could penetrate.

That made me stop short. Only West knew East and I didn't actually hate each other, so I couldn't just walk over there—

What was I thinking? Of course I fucking could. I didn't give a shit what any of those guys thought. It wasn't like I'd do anything stupid, like kiss him in the middle of the atrium.

As if he'd heard my busy thoughts, East glanced up, and the steel barrier he usually kept up softened a bit. He curled his finger, gesturing me to come over, but I was already moving. West was the first one to see me coming, but then Travis followed his gaze and stepped out in front of me before I could get to East.

"I don't fuckin' think so," he said, those kohl-lined eyes narrowing to slits. "He's not in the mood for your shit and neither are we, so you can move along now."

I went to step by him anyway, and the big, scowling one blocked me this time.

"Take one more step," Daire taunted me, like he hoped I'd do just that.

East rolled his eyes. "Stand down, Reaper."

This time it was Donovan who moved forward and held his hands up. "It's not a good time, Zac. How about you give him a break, man?"

I looked to East and held my hand out. I didn't even think, I just did, and he must've been on the same wavelength, because he took it and pulled me past his friends to be with him.

A hushed curse met my ears from one of his crew, but I didn't bother to check who as I moved in close to East. I searched his features for signs of stress, but when all I saw was a slight smirk and raised eyebrow, my anxiety eased a bit.

"Taking a bit of a risk being seen out here with me, aren't you, *Zacharius*?"

There he was, the leader of the Park Avenue Princes back in full swing, but *this* time I didn't want to strangle him.

"I don't really care."

"No?" East grazed his thumb over the back of my hand. "Who are you and what did you do with my uptight TA?"

"Uh, yeah," Travis piped up. "I'd like to know that too. What the fuck is this?"

He gestured to our joined hands, and I let go. The last thing East needed was to be caught up in a scandal with a TA. But I'd needed that moment of contact with him, to hell with the gawking eyes around us.

"It's nothing," I said at the exact same time East announced, "It's none of your business."

"What do you mean it's none of our— Wait, are you two…" Travis did a double take at how close we were standing, but before he could form another thought, West shoved him in the arm.

"Stop making a scene. That's the last thing East needs."

West then leveled me with a look that said, *Get him the hell out of here.*

Before I thought through the consequences, I reached for East's hand again. "Can we talk?"

I wasn't sure why I was so surprised when he nodded. But if that had my head spinning, his lacing his fingers with mine almost had me passing out.

"Lead the way."

"Holy fuck," someone said from behind us as we started to walk away from East's friends. "Did he get a lobotomy during spring break?"

"Seems like he got poked and prodded with *something*, that's for sure," another said.

"Did East just tell someone else to *lead* the way?"

My lips twitched at his friends' disbelief as their questions faded and I found us somewhere quiet to talk for a moment. If anyone saw us, I didn't notice or care—I just wanted to make sure he was all right and see if there was anything I could do to make his day easier.

"How are you doing this morning?" I said, making sure my back was to the hall, shielding him from any prying eyes.

"The same as I was when I woke up next to you this morning—good. Why? Do I not look good?"

Of course his mind went there, but East had nothing to worry about in the looks department. Between his fashion sense and aristocratic good looks, he was one of the most attractive guys I'd ever met.

"You look fantastic and you know it. Just like you know that I don't mean that. Stop deflecting—it's just you and me right now."

"I'm aware. I've got to say, it was pretty hot the way you just forgot who you were out there for a minute, Mr. TA. I think you might've just short-circuited my friends' brains."

"I didn't forget. I just didn't care." I squeezed his fingers between mine. "You're more important than that."

East sighed and let go of my hand, and the cocky front he'd put on display slipped away, leaving the vulnerable man King and I had fallen asleep with the night before.

"I didn't think this would be so hard," he said more to himself than me. "Coming back here and acting like everything is okay."

I couldn't begin to imagine what he was going through—no one could. East hadn't seen or heard from his father since his arrest, and his mother didn't exactly strike me as the nurturing type. He'd been cut off from all his friends until this morning, when he'd learned his father had finally made bail, and now here he was, putting on the show of his life.

He had a reputation to uphold, and considering he was one of the most pretentious people to walk the halls of Astor, he wasn't exactly garnering sympathy from the student body—more like apathy. They didn't care what happened to James Easton or his father. In fact, most of them had popped the popcorn and were watching with rabid interest to see the mighty fall. Something I might've gotten on board with months ago, before I'd gotten to see behind East's façade.

Was he arrogant? Yes. Was he condescending? Yes. Something I was beginning to suspect he'd *had* to be in order to survive the family he was born into. A defense mechanism of sorts. If he showed even the slightest hint of vulnerability, his father would've eaten him alive. What had East called him? A shark? I couldn't imagine how he'd had to swim in waters with someone like that his whole life, always worrying he'd be bitten.

Everyone thought they knew East, knew what made him tick. But there was so much more beneath the surface.

"You don't have to act with me—you know that, right?"

"I know, it's just…" East shook his head.

“What?”

“This is going to sound so fucking stupid.”

“I’m sure it won’t. Try me.”

“I don’t know who I am without this name, without…money. So I’m just out here faking it. Acting like nothing’s changed. When the fact is I’m not sure I can afford a goddamn coffee this morning.”

“East?” When his eyes fell to the ground, I put a finger to his chin to bring them back up to mine. “There is so much more to you than your money.”

“Sure there is.”

“There *is*,” I said, then lowered my voice. “Do you really think King and I were thinking about your name, money, or connections while you were on the island? While we’ve been back here?”

“No.”

“Exactly. You have so much to offer. You’ve just never had to think about it before.”

East snorted. “Yeah, well, I’d rather not have to think about it now, either.”

My lips twitched, and I let him go before I did something crazy, like kiss him right there in the hall. “I know, but there are always options when it comes to making money. Things outside of your father’s business. Like The Cellar, for example. You could come and work with me.”

“As a waiter?” East looked so horrified I couldn’t help but laugh. “Thanks for the offer, but I don’t really think I’m busboy material.”

“I didn’t mean as a waiter. I was thinking more behind the scenes.”

I knew it was a far cry from how he’d always seen his life playing out. He’d said himself he was being groomed to take over his father’s company, so anything less than a multimillion-dollar position must seem like a horrifying option.

But just when I thought East would throw it back in my face, he leaned in and kissed me on the cheek.

“Thanks for the offer. Who knows, I might just have to take you up on it.”

I hoped that wasn’t the case. Not because I didn’t think he was capable, but because I knew what it meant to me to be a part of my family’s business, and I wanted that for East.

But at the same time, I didn’t want to see him hurt.

“Anytime.” I glanced at my watch, knowing it was getting close to the first lecture of the morning, and there was someone else who wanted to see East before that. “Look, if you don’t have anywhere else to be before your first lecture, there’s a certain professor who’d like to see you.”

“Why? I came straight to Astor like he told me to.”

I chuckled at the frown forming between his brows. “Relax. He just wants to make sure you’re okay.”

“Oh.” East’s eyes took on that playful glint I hadn’t seen in days. “So I’m not in trouble?”

“Do you want to be?”

He shrugged and stepped around me, back out in to the hall. “I don’t know. If it means I might get a spanking, maybe?”

“You’re incorrigible. Now go, or you’ll be late for your king.”

“Yes, sir.” He went to walk away, but stopped and said, “Thank you for checking on me.”

And before I could utter a response, East disappeared out into the hall.

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FORTY-ONE

east

WHETHER I WANTED to admit it or not, having Zac make a surprise appearance just to check on me had my chest squeezing something fierce. Only this time I knew I wasn't in danger of having a heart attack, though my friends might be.

Smirking to myself at their reaction, I made my way across the building, easily able to ignore the stares directed my way with every step I took. Not that people staring was anything new for me, but the reason why was altogether different now.

Normally, I'd tell them all to fuck off, but I didn't even care to this morning. Why would I bother when the people who actually mattered had my back?

I couldn't help the smile that wanted to break free as I thought back to waking up with Zac and King earlier. The panic attack that had begun back on the island was nowhere to be found. In fact, having them nearby—and making Zac take the middle spot—eased my restlessness, and I hadn't woken up even once during the night.

Who the hell *was* I?

I wasn't the kind of guy who got caught up in feelings, but it was becoming impossible to ignore the way I missed them when they were gone. The way I sought them out when I knew they were near. The way they seemed to occupy my mind even though I had a million other important things I should've been thinking about.

I'd never been more terrified in my life, but at the same time, never felt safer. It was strange to rely on anyone other than myself, but with King and

Zac I'd finally started to let my guard down. To let them see behind the walls I was always so careful to stand behind.

I was so caught up in my thoughts, I almost missed seeing my father slip in through the back door.

Holy shit. What?

My feet stopped moving, and I was sure I was hallucinating. King had told me he'd made bail, but the last thing I expected was to see him at Astor.

"What the fuck?"

Instead of heading to King's office, I pivoted in my father's direction, and when he saw me coming, something that looked like relief crossed his face and he inclined his head for me to follow.

Huh. He was here to see me, then?

I headed toward the back hall where he'd disappeared and glanced behind me as I rounded the corner, making sure neither of us had been followed.

But when I turned back, the hall was empty, nothing but offices—

"James." My father's voice was low, and I whirled around to see him standing inside Professor Efron's empty office. I followed him in, keeping the door cracked so I could listen out for anyone walking by and turned to face him.

The great Niles Easton was a proud man, tall, in shape, his dark brown hair only threaded with silver, always, always immaculately dressed in a custom suit from our tailor in Italy. He was why I took great care in my own attire, because no one respected a man who didn't look the part.

Only now, his sharp features were even more prominent, with etched lines in his forehead where I'd never noticed them before, and a downturn to his mouth. He didn't look like a man at the top of his game. He looked like he'd been put through the wringer.

"James." My father wasn't a man who showed affection, so when he laid a hand on my shoulder, I tensed up.

"What are you doing here?"

That wasn't what I'd expected to ask him when I saw him again. I assumed I'd express some feeling of relief that he was no longer behind bars. That he'd answer all my questions, reassure me this was a big misunderstanding and everything was fine.

But in the pit of my stomach, I knew. Everything was *not* fine. And my father wasn't innocent.

He squeezed my shoulder before drawing his hand away. "I wanted to see you."

"Why?" I couldn't remember a time he'd ever stopped by Astor, and definitely not to see me.

My father tilted his head to the side, his hazel eyes the same color as mine sharpening. "Aren't you glad I'm here? That I'm free? I've been through hell the last few days."

"Yeah. I heard." I crossed my arms and stepped back, putting some space between us. "Care to explain what's been going on?"

"I beg your pardon?"

His choice of words had me scoffing. "From what I hear, that's exactly what you'll be doing. Begging for a pardon."

"Don't tell me you believe all the rumors. I raised you to be smarter than that."

"Uh huh. So you're telling me you're innocent? You didn't do any of the things you've been charged with?"

He let out a long sigh and rested on the edge of the desk. "Business is complicated. You'll learn that soon enough."

"It's a yes-or-no question."

"Nothing is ever that cut and dry, James," he snapped. "Once you graduate and enter the real world, you'll understand."

"Riiight. Because I'll have a degree that makes it suddenly possible to learn the deceptive ways of the world. Makes sense."

"Don't speak that way to me. You may not approve or like my ways, but you *will* respect me."

And that was the thing—I always had. I'd respected and admired my father, had always thought he was the smartest man in the city because he was one of the most successful. One of the richest. He was the owner of Easton Tower, one of Manhattan's architectural masterpieces, for Christ's sake.

All of that, gone with the click of the handcuffs on his wrists.

There was so much I wanted to say in that moment, the last few days' worth of festering emotions just dying to come out, but it felt a hell of a lot deeper than that. Like I'd been holding on to resentment toward him for longer than I realized.

“Did you really come here just to see me?” I asked, breaking the silence.

“I did.” He reached into the inside pocket of his jacket and pulled something out. “While I’m here, I thought you could hold on to these for me.”

I stared down at the folded legal-sized envelope but didn’t move to take it. “What’s that?”

“Just a few documents that need safekeeping.”

My eyes flicked up to his. “Why don’t you put them in the safe?”

“Because they’re important, and I’d rather entrust you with them.”

“I’m sure Mother would hold on to them for you if they’re so important.”

He shoved the papers toward me, exasperated. “Just fucking take them.”

Something told me not to. Call it a gut instinct, but there was no way in hell I was holding on to anything that could be a piece of incriminating evidence.

“I don’t think so,” I said, keeping my arms crossed.

“Excuse me?”

“I said no. I’m not getting involved in whatever you have going on.”

I’d never seen my father’s face turn several shades of red so fast, but he was practically scarlet as he snarled, “You’re my son and the future head of my company. You *will* do this for me.”

“Company? What company?” I dropped my arms by my sides and took a step toward him. “The one supposedly meant for me that you just flushed down the toilet by wheeling and dealing illegally? I always knew you were ruthless, but call me crazy, I thought it was because you were good at your job and worked hard.”

“That’s rich coming from you. You’ve been handed everything your whole life, and now that one thing goes wrong, you’re ready to jump ship?”

“Better than going down with a sinking one.”

“You ungrateful fuck—” He grabbed me by the front of my shirt and jerked me forward, and I’d braced myself for the hit I knew was coming when the door slammed open.

“Take your hands off him.” King’s voice was lethal behind me.

My father looked up and narrowed his eyes but didn’t loosen his grip. “This doesn’t concern you.”

“You’ll find that it does. Let. Him. Go.”

His moment of hesitation gave me the time to extricate myself from his grasp and back away to where King stood, his black eyes so full of fury that I was shocked my father was still standing.

With the envelope still in hand, he straightened the lapels of his suit jacket and went to hand me the documents again. “My son and I were just discussing a personal matter.”

I shook my head. “I told you I’m not taking those.”

“James, do what I say—”

“No.”

“This isn’t a request—”

“And I’m not your scapegoat. Deal with it yourself.”

Shock crossed his face before my father started forward again, but King moved to stand between the two of us, blocking him from taking another step. I’d never seen my parents lift a hand toward me or anyone, so the fact that he was so obviously in a desperate way told me things were far worse than he was letting on. And that scared the shit out of me.

“You won’t raise a hand to him again,” King said, his voice betraying a calmness his rigid stance belied. “Because if you do, you won’t enjoy the consequences the way I will. And I *will* enjoy them. Immensely. So try me. I dare you.”

My father’s mouth parted, like he’d never been spoken to that way in his life—he probably hadn’t—and then his expression hardened again, his jaw clenched tight.

“I don’t know who the fuck you think you are—”

“Tyrone Kingston, a professor here at Astor, and you, Niles Easton, are trespassing.”

“I’m not—”

“The terms of your bail include a strict house arrest order, which means you’re in clear violation by setting foot here. One call from an anonymous source and the court will not only revoke your bond, but they’ll issue a warrant for your arrest.”

My eyes went wide, my heart thundering so loud I wondered if they could hear it, but if either of them noticed, they didn’t acknowledge it. They were too busy engaging in a power struggle that my father wouldn’t win. He couldn’t. King held the ace, and everyone in this room knew it.

“You really should think about leaving now.” King cocked his head like there wasn’t an insane amount of power vibrating off him in waves. “I’m

sure you'd hate for your son to see you in handcuffs up close and personal. That's the kind of thing that could really fuck someone up for life. Don't you think?"

I always thought my father was a scary son of a bitch, but there was an edge to King's voice that told me this was him playing nice for my benefit only.

It was so fucking hot.

My father's nostrils flared, and after a long, tense silence, he folded the envelope and tucked it back into his jacket pocket. Then he strolled toward the door like he hadn't just been dressed down and threatened by someone he thought was only a professor.

King angled his body in front of mine, and when my father stopped at the door, he gave me a severe look. "I'll call you later. *Son*."

And then he left. Just like that, without another word, taking whatever he'd been trying to palm off on me with him. I didn't know what was in that envelope, and I didn't want to.

The second he was out of sight, King turned to face me, all that built-up rage still simmering beneath the surface. He cupped my jaw, and I leaned into his hand. Dark eyes roamed over my face, searching for any sign of distress, but I wasn't thinking about my father anymore.

No, all I could think about now was that King cared enough to stand up to him. To stand up for me. No one ever did that. I never let them, because that would be a sign of weakness, and us Easton men were the top of the food chain.

At least, that was what I always thought. Until today.

But King had stepped up for me, and so had Zac. Neither of them had to, and they did it anyway. I wasn't an easy person to navigate, and now that I didn't have shit to offer either of them, I knew it wasn't my money or status they cared about.

Fuck. My heart hammered as emotions threatened to overwhelm me, especially as I watched the hard set of King's jaw and shoulders begin to ease.

"My office, little prince," he said quietly, but still full of authority that set my body on fire. "Now."

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FORTY-TWO

king

I SHUT THE door behind East as he stepped inside my office, doing my best to get a handle on my emotions before I spoke.

It wasn't often that I lost my temper, especially here on Astor's grounds. But when I'd seen Niles Easton towering over East in a way meant to intimidate, something inside me had snapped. Something I'd been unable to rein in.

I hadn't thought twice about stepping in to defend East, and while I wanted to believe I'd do the same for any of my students, I knew there was more to it than that. Where I might stand up for them or help them out of a difficult situation, this drive to protect East was accompanied by a much more primal urge—the need to claim and possess.

I'd wanted Niles to know East was mine, and that if he came sniffing around him again, it would be *me* he had to deal with.

The motherfucking king.

"You didn't have to do that out there," East said, trailing his fingers over my desk as he walked around to stand behind my chair. "I was handling it."

"I know you were." I leaned back against the door, holding the handle in a death grip. It was either that or punch the wall. "But you shouldn't have had to. He shouldn't have come to you here. Nor should he have been able to get to you. I made it clear no one was to get through the gates unless they had identification."

And whoever had failed to uphold *that* particular rule was going to get an ear lashing from me, and possibly their walking papers.

“You were pretty worked up out there…” East looked at me from across the room, his eyes hooded. “You know, for one of your students.”

I knew he was testing me, pushing to see if I’d admit to our relationship now that we were back at school.

“You and I both know you’re a hell of a lot more than one of my students.” I turned the lock on the door. “Did Zac catch up with you?”

“He did. Right before I ran into my father.”

The weariness from the last couple of days was now only a faint blemish on East’s otherwise perfect features, and when I took his face between my hands and leaned in to capture his lips with mine, he slid his hands under the lapels of my jacket to rest against my chest.

I knew I shouldn’t be doing this here and now, but just as it had been with Zac, the temptation of having East near was too much to resist, and I realized that somewhere along the way I’d started to think of them as *mine*.

I swept my tongue around the sweet interior of East’s mouth, swallowing the delicious moan that bubbled up out of him as I laid claim in the only way available to me here. I wanted to comfort him, reassure and soothe him, and when I lifted my head, the expression in his eyes told me he felt all those things.

Something I was sure he’d be horrified to realize.

I brushed my thumb across his kiss-swollen lips, then reached for my chair and took a seat. East moved between me and the desk, leaning back against it.

“Zac said you wanted to see me.”

“That’s right. I wanted to check in with you and see how your morning was.”

East shrugged. “I would’ve said good until I ran into my felon father in the hallway, but hey, wouldn’t be a Wednesday without a little drama.”

“Is there any day you *don’t* have drama?”

“What can I say?” He brushed an imaginary piece of lint from his lapel. “I *am* the drama.”

I chuckled despite myself, knowing that somewhere along the way *I’d* become tangled up in his drama—but also knowing I wouldn’t change it for a second, no matter what the rational part of my brain was telling me. I was in too deep now. I’d known it the second I’d decided to bring him and Zac back to my place.

“That you might be. But the way you handled your father just now shows that you have the ability to—”

“Not be a bratty asshole?”

“I was thinking more *rise above those who want to bring you down.* Those who might want you to do something you don’t want to.”

“I’m more than capable of saying no, professor.”

“I know. But it was more than that. I imagine it had to be difficult to defy your father.”

East opened his mouth to no doubt shoot that down. But then he quickly shut it and nodded. Progress. He wasn’t deflecting anymore.

“It was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done.” He brushed his hand against his pant leg as though trying to wipe it clean. “I still can’t believe he did what they’re saying. I can’t wrap my head around the idea that my father isn’t the smart, cutthroat real estate tycoon I always thought he was. That *I* always wanted to be. But instead is this…desperate, pathetic criminal who just tried to blackmail me into taking and hiding some documents for him.”

“Fucking prick. I should’ve strangled him for putting you in that position.” I got to my feet, and East shifted back on the desk, hand up.

“I know—that’s why I didn’t take them.”

“I wouldn’t have cared if you did. I care that he asked you to.”

“I’m not. I think I needed to see with my own two eyes what he was capable of, otherwise I wouldn’t have believed it. But the fact he would be willing to ruin *my* life, *my* future to save his own…”

I reached for his chin, raising his face to mine. “Not on my fucking watch.”

“You know, you’re seriously hot when you get all growly and possessive.”

That shouldn’t have made my chest tighten the way it did, but I couldn’t deny that’s what I was being. Let alone the way I wanted to scoop him up into my arms and tell him everything would be all right. “Is that what I’m doing?”

“You *and* Zac. Both making public declarations for little old me.”

It didn’t surprise me that Zac had laid some kind of claim too with how he’d been acting when he left our office earlier. What *was* surprising was that East wasn’t breaking out in hives over it.

“Listen, I don’t want you to be worrying about your future, okay? You need to concentrate on graduating.”

“Okay, but then what? It’s not like people will be lining up to hire someone whose father is known for embezzlement and tax evasion. No one is going to want to touch me with a ten-foot pole. I’ll be a fucking pariah.”

“I won’t let that happen. What your father’s done will not define you. Not unless you let it.”

“Fuck that.”

I nodded and retook my seat. “Exactly. There are so many paths open to you right now. I know Zac mentioned his family. You’re surrounded by a smart—if not delinquent—group of friends going places. And if it’s something else you’re interested in, I have several businesses that you could get involved with if you choose to come and work for me.”

East’s eyes welled up as he looked at me, and the slow swallow he took revealed his emotions were just under the surface, threatening to spill over.

I reached a hand out to him, wondering if he would take it. He’d once told me he didn’t cuddle because it was far too intimate. But when he laced his fingers with mine and slid down to straddle my thighs, he proved just how far he’d come.

“You’d want me to work for you?” he said as he wound his arms around my neck.

“I would. I’m invested in your future, James. As a professor and—”

“As Batman?”

My body shook with laughter as I smoothed my hands up his back. “Yes, and as Batman.”

“Aha, so you admit it.” He grinned, and I couldn’t help pressing a kiss to those curved lips.

“I admit nothing, except wanting you to succeed. You’re so smart and curious, tenacious and resourceful in a way that will only develop with age. There’s no end to your potential. Just like there’s no expiration on this offer.”

“So even with my all my father’s issues, you’d still want to work with me?”

“Yes.”

“And what about that other...*secret* thing. Is that still...?”

His words trailed off, but we both knew what he was asking. Would his father’s crimes preclude him from being recruited?

“Yes. We still want you.”

“We?” I could see he wanted to ask more, but I was proud of the fact he was trying to be discreet with his questions. A week ago he would’ve just blurted them out, to hell with the consequences.

“Yes. Any decisions made are done so as a collective. Not through a dictatorship.”

“And you’ve already discussed this?”

“Yes. So even if this—whatever this is between the three of us—ends, you’ll still have a bright future ahead of you.”

“*If* it ends?” East ran a hand down from my neck to rest it on my chest. “I thought you said that was the smart thing to do?”

“And I thought *you* said you didn’t cuddle?” I wrapped my arms around his waist and tugged him forward, nuzzling his neck. “In case you haven’t noticed, I don’t really care about being smart anymore. You?”

East leaned back and looked into my eyes. “I never claimed to be smart. That’s Zac…”

He let go of me and moved off my lap, walking to the door, and just when I thought he might fully shut me down, he stopped and turned back to look at me.

“But I sure as fuck love the way you two cuddle. See you tonight, professor.”

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FORTY-THREE

zac

“LET’S GO OVER your roles for this little visit, shall we?” East turned in the front passenger seat of yet another of King’s cars. “Since it’s probably not wise to introduce you to my mother as ‘men I like to fuck,’ considering she’s met you both at school functions in a different, more professional capacity, I’ve given you new characters.”

“Oh God.” I groaned and slumped in the back seat. “I don’t know what’s worse, King. That we’re just ‘men East likes to fuck’ or that he’s creating a play in his mind.”

King slowed to a stop at the red light and met my eyes in the rearview mirror. “As long as we’re not asked to do accents. I can’t say I’ve ever been good at them.”

“No? I bet you’d sound hot doing a Boston accent.”

“Hello?” East pointed at me and then King with a stern finger. “Neither of you are doing accents. In fact, feel free not to say much at all.”

“Gonna gag us with an ascot to keep us quiet?” I grinned.

“Don’t tempt me,” East said, and then paused. “Actually, tempt me later.”

“Deal.”

“Good. Now, if my mother asks, Zac, you’re my friend who’s with me for emotional support. King, you’re coming in an advisory capacity, since obviously I’d listen to what my wise professor has to say.”

“That’d be a first.” King winked at East and then made the right turn the GPS indicated.

It was Friday afternoon, and we were headed to the family estate of East's mother's family in Connecticut, where she'd been staying since the news broke. When East called her to check in last night, she'd said it was important that he come for a visit as soon as he could. She didn't give him any more information than that, and when he'd hung up, he looked pale—probably thinking terrible thoughts, imagining how it could possibly get worse. Both King and I had been about to offer to go with him when East surprised us both by asking us first.

It'd been a *holy shitballs* moment when we realized East's walls were slowly coming down. Not that we'd ever point that out to him, because he was like a skittish animal. You had to creep up on him without his realizing, or even better, let him come to you.

If East knew I was comparing him to an animal of any kind right now, I was sure my role would change to "man I liked to fuck that I just pushed out of the car."

"Did you grow *up* out here?" I asked as I looked out at the new leaves on the trees passing us by, finding it difficult to imagine a young East running around outside.

"We used to have a house nearby. No need to sound so shocked."

"I mean, I'm just trying to imagine you in any setting other than the concrete city you seem to love so much."

"I can become one with nature. Or have you forgotten a certain waterfall?"

I didn't think anyone in this car would *ever* forget coming in that waterfall, but it was the suburban feel I was having difficulty wrapping my head around.

"It's just the quietness of it all, I guess. I always imagined young East in a tiny suit surrounded by the sparkly lights of the city. Not all this… greenery."

King chuckled. "He has a point."

"That I don't look good in green? That's the color of money. I look *fabulous* in green. Not that I'll likely see that shade much longer with the rate my family is going. What about you?" East asked, glancing back at me. "Did you grow up in the city?"

It was hard to believe that after all the time I'd spent with East, this was the first time we were really talking about our families. Not that you'd generally bring them up with a casual hookup. But again, that just proved

whatever was happening between us was turning into a whole lot more than casual.

“Yeah, my parents have a place in Brooklyn. It’s where they opened their first restaurant, and they still live there today.”

“Wait. So your parents, the people who own The Cellar, live in the same house you grew up in?”

I laughed at the disbelief on East’s face. It was blowing his mind that someone who owned and ran a multimillion-dollar business *chose* to live in a simple brownstone across the river.

“They do. They’re sentimental like that. Too many memories to just up and leave.”

“You can always make new memories.”

“True, but you can’t replace the height marker on the mudroom wall where they measured me each year.”

“Your parents are wonderful people,” King said. “I knew that by the son they raised, but seeing their business grow over the years only solidifies it. They’re hardworking, proud people, and they care about their community.”

“Oh God, and here I am with a convicted father and an apathetic mother,” East said. “Guess that shows in the son they raised too.”

King reached over and laid a hand on his leg. “You aren’t your parents, just like Zac isn’t his, and every day you’re making decisions that set you apart from them, and that shows a real strength of character.”

East sighed and looked out the window, and I could only hope he took what King said to heart. Over the last few days, we’d seen the old East start to re-emerge, but with a newfound drive to work out a way forward from this mess. He’d been looking into possible opportunities in some of the companies King owned, and really taking an interest in asking about my family’s business. It was as if a fire had been lit inside him, but the second he’d gotten the call from his mother, that flame had started to flicker. My only hope was that this visit with her today didn’t snuff it out completely.

We turned onto a drive with a set of wrought-iron gates fit for a palace, and when East announced himself and they yawned open, the house that came into view nearly fit that description.

“So much for destitute. If this is in the family, can’t you just…get a loan?” I said.

“This belongs to my grandparents. I haven’t been here in years. Neither has my mother, for that matter.”

“Family rift?”

“Let’s just say they never took to my father, and it looks like their instincts were spot-on.”

I glanced at the vintage Rolls-Royce parked in front of the multi-car garage. Yeah, so much for running around in the suburbs. Even though I’d grown up around money, both King and East were in an entirely different stratosphere that should’ve probably made me feel uncomfortable. Instead, I found myself more curious than ever, wanting to know everything about them. Their pasts, their wants, what drove them crazy in *and* out of the bedroom. They were both endlessly fascinating in a way I’d never expected, and one thing was for sure—I’d been kept on my toes since we came together.

When King parked at the front of the circular drive, East reached for the door handle and took in a deep breath. “Here goes nothing.”

“No matter what happens, your life is just beginning,” King said. “Remember that.”

East didn’t respond with a sarcastic comeback, only nodded, and we followed him into the estate. The parlor exuded an old-money aesthetic, with its rich velvet floor-to-ceiling curtains pulled open to let in the sun, and not one speck of dust on any of the polished surfaces. As King and I took up spots on one of the upholstered loveseats and East took the one opposite us, I nodded toward the grand piano in the corner.

“Do you play?” I asked.

East smirked at the question. “Are you implying I’ve got talented fingers?”

I looked back at the doorway, hoping like hell his family hadn’t overheard that. It didn’t exactly fit my role as “friend and emotional support.”

East started to chuckle, but it died off as his mother entered the parlor and he got to his feet.

It was instantly clear where East got his flair for the dramatic. She looked like royalty with her dark hair pinned up high, gorgeous jewels hanging from her ears and neck, and her cream silk dress flowing after her as she swept inside and greeted her son with a double air kiss. Then she turned to us and held her hand out—not to shake, but to kiss.

King didn’t miss a beat, lifting the back of her hand to his mouth in greeting, and I mimicked the move, even though it felt completely weird to

do so. What happened to a good old-fashioned hand shake or even a hug?

“I’m so happy you’re here, James,” she said, perching on the end of the couch beside him and fluffing her outfit out around her. “Have you shown your guests the grounds?”

“No, we just got here. You made it sound like it was urgent for me to come, so”—he spread his hands wide—“here I am.”

“Tea,” she said suddenly, and rang a little bell on the coffee table between us. One of the house staff appeared almost immediately. “Provisions for my guests, please, Tara.”

“Yes, Mrs. Easton.”

East’s mother visibly cringed at the title but then put on a tight smile for her son. “It’s been a dreadful week, darling. How are you?”

“I’m fine.”

“Are you? Are you not just devastated by what your father’s done? Ruined us both.” She plucked a tissue from an ornate box on the table and dabbed at nonexistent tears.

East surprised me then by covering his mother’s hand with his. “We’ll figure it out. We won’t let that bastard win.”

Her eyes widened slightly, and then Tara came back with a tray, and East’s mother pulled her hand free from his. Tara prepared coffee and tea for each of us to our specifications, and then gestured for us to help ourselves to the assortment of canapes on several levels of a mini tower.

Once we’d selected a few—though East didn’t touch anything—his mother rang the bell again, only this time it was a different woman, this one in a suit and carrying a briefcase, who entered.

“James, this is one of my lawyers, Marcia. She’s been drawing up the divorce papers—”

“Divorce?” he said. “You’re leaving him?”

“You don’t think I’d stay to further sully my name?”

I glanced at King, wondering if we should maybe remove ourselves from the conversation, but the second I shifted on the seat, East shot me a look that said, *Stay*.

“No. I think you’re doing the right thing.”

“Of course I am. He made this mess; he can be the one to clean it up.” She pretended to pick at some imaginary lint on her skirt, and I thought it sweet that her and her son shared the same nervous habit.

“I couldn’t agree more. But—” East stopped himself and shook his head.

His mother took a tiny sip of tea and carefully placed it on the saucer before bringing it to her lap. “You have questions. Perhaps wondering how it is we’re back here.”

East nodded. “We haven’t exactly had family time here in years.”

“Well, understandably their disdain for your father was apparent even before we married, but they tolerated him when you were young. Only because he became successful enough to provide for us, but…” She glanced at King and me and seemed to rethink her words. “Well, the cause of our drifting apart is neither here nor there. They wanted me to leave your father, and of course I wasn’t going to do that.”

My first instinct was that she didn’t leave East’s father because she didn’t need her family’s money if she was married to a billionaire. I wasn’t sure about King, but I was utterly engrossed in her story, so much so my cucumber sandwich was still half eaten in my hand. I popped the rest of it in my mouth as she continued.

“It was unfortunate that they cut off my inheritance, as well as your own, James, but I never imagined your father would put us in such a precarious position.”

“I had an inheritance through your parents? Why didn’t you ever tell me that?”

“Because by the time you were old enough to know what that was, it was gone.”

East eyed her warily. “Are you getting to the part where you tell me how we ended up back here and what all this means?”

“Well, darling, I would’ve thought it was obvious. Once the divorce papers are signed, we’re back in their good graces. Which means neither of us will need your father’s money—well, whatever will be left of it.”

“Neither of us?” His words were careful, but I could see the way East had scooted to the edge of his seat. “Are you saying—”

“That your trust will be reinstated. You were set to receive it on your twenty-first birthday, and that’s passed, so Marcia will have you sign a few things so you can access it when it becomes available.”

East’s lips parted. “When will that be?”

“I don’t imagine your father will contest the divorce, so it should be a few weeks, but no longer than a couple of months.” She gestured for Marcia

to hand her the paperwork for East to look over.

“Fifty million dollars?” he said, looking at the document.

“I know it’s not what you were expecting, but it should help you get started once you graduate.”

Did she just imply fifty *million* was chump change? I almost fell off the couch, and King would’ve had to catch me. Shit, fifty million was probably pennies to him too. Maybe I needed to get out of the restaurant business.

As East casually flipped through the rest of the paperwork and signed what he needed to, I wondered if his mother noticed he was about to jump out of his skin. Outwardly he was so calm, so nonchalant, but this new development was one he hadn’t seen coming, and I knew if she hadn’t been sitting beside him, he would’ve been jumping up on the damn couch and whooping up a storm. The car ride home was going to be *loud*.

As East set his pen down and handed the documents to Marcia, he settled back on the couch and looked over at King and me. He was trying hard to bite back a grin, but when King and I couldn’t help but smile at him, he lost the battle.

A dejected East just wasn’t the guy I knew, and this week had been a series of lows for him. Then again, it’d given us a glimpse at the vulnerability he’d buried so deep. And getting beneath those layers had opened our eyes to the man now desperately trying to keep his emotions in check. It had given us a chance to discover that there was more to James Easton than what was on the surface. True emotions that he kept hidden away from most, but had, for reasons I was sure he wasn’t quite ready to admit to yet, shared with me and King.

“Perfect.” His mother clasped her hands together and leaned in for East to kiss her cheek. “Do keep in touch, James. Perhaps get yourself a new phone, since yours doesn’t seem to be working.”

She and Marcia rose at the same time, but before she could get far, East said, “Well, wait, since I’m here, wouldn’t my grandparents like to see me?”

“Oh, they’re not here. They’ve gone to Nantucket for the month.” She smiled at King and me before sweeping her dress around her slender frame. “Lovely to meet you both, and safe travels, my darling.”

I glanced at King, confused as to whether her exit meant she wasn’t coming back or if that was a normal thing rich people did when they were done with company.

East wasn’t the least bit affected by the ten minutes she’d graced us with her presence, bounding to his feet. He swiped a couple of canapes and bolted for the door like he was about to burst, and I could only chuckle as we followed.

It wasn’t until he’d climbed into the back seat—another shock to my system—and we joined him that he let out the loudest whoop I’d ever heard.

“Hell yes, fuckers! I’m back!”

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FORTY-FOUR

east

I WAS RICH, bitch.

The universe had realigned and the world *finally* made sense again.

Thank. God.

For a moment there—a very brief moment—I'd been contemplating how I was going to afford a good therapist to help me understand and process how to live a life I was unaccustomed to.

But there was no need for that now. Not with the gift my grandparents had so graciously bestowed upon me, and it *was* a gift. Something I wouldn't have appreciated a week ago but now realized I was incredibly grateful for.

Maybe this was some kind of life lesson. To teach me what *not* to do to piss away the millions of dollars in my bank account. Though I'd think not being a dirty cheat would be common sense for staying out of jail.

Well, that and not being caught.

"Okay, so where are we going to celebrate?" I said as Manhattan's skyline came into view. There was no way I was staying in tonight, not with the news I'd just received and after a week of TV watching and drinking my sorrows away, I was antsy for a night out.

I looked out at the city, wondering what West and the rest of the guys were up to tonight, but instead found myself curious as to how I could get the two in the car to come with me instead.

"We?" Zac, of course, was the first to try to make me see sense. "Not sure how that's going to work. It's not like we can just rock up somewhere and all have a meal." He looked over his shoulder to me. "The paparazzi are

just waiting for you to reappear on the social scene. How do you think it's going to look when your first appearance is hanging out with a professor from Astor and his TA?"

I batted my lashes at Zac's all-too-serious expression. He was being a total downer right now. "Like I'm furthering my education."

King's deep chuckle filled the vehicle as his eyes found mine in the rearview mirror. "Yes, I'm sure that would be a completely believable story."

"I mean, it would be, if you weren't so fuckin' hot."

"Am I supposed to apologize for that?" King responded.

"No, but maybe we could dress you in a tweed suit and a bowler hat to lessen suspicion that I'm spending every night in your bed."

Zac snorted, and I turned his way.

"And you? *You* need to stop looking at the both of us like you're remembering the way you fell asleep between us—naked."

Zac's cheeks colored. "I don't do that."

"Yes you do."

Zac looked at King and licked along his bottom lip.

"See? You're doing it right fucking now. God, you have the worst poker face."

"How about this," King said, reaching across the console to squeeze Zac's thigh. "You two go out, and East, invite your friends. I have a place, Limitless, and it's—"

"Only the hottest club in the city right now." I shook my head, still not used to the fact that Professor Kingston was actually the head of TerraKohr, and owner of practically every hotspot in New York—not to mention around the world.

"That's right. I can get you in privately and have them set up a space for you and your friends. No press, no prying eyes. You'll be taken care of from the second you walk in."

That all sounded pretty damn amazing, except for one thing. "You won't be there?"

"I don't think that's very—"

"Smart?" Zac and I said in unison.

"Exactly. But your friends, they know about Zac. It won't be too much of a shock to see him there with you."

I raised a brow at Zac. “So? Are you down for a night of debauchery with me?”

“And the rest of the Park Avenue Princes?”

“I didn’t realize you were part of our fan club.”

A slow, sexy smile curved Zac’s lips. “I might be a fan of yours.”

“Might? Is there anything I can do to tip your vote?”

“Yes, but you won’t want to do that in front of your friends.”

“On the contrary, *Zacharius*, that’s exactly the kind of debauchery I prefer to get into.”

“EVERYONE OPEN WIDE.” I stood up on the VIP table and held up the bottle of Mandala Tequila. “Caleb, don’t be a pussy—get your ass over here.”

“You’re a bad influence,” he grumbled, but made his way to where my friends were all gathered around. “But just this once.”

“Can’t stop, won’t stop,” I said, grinning wide as I went down the line and poured the liquid into each of their greedy, waiting mouths.

It was a shame King wasn’t here to celebrate, but that might’ve proven too much of a shock to the guys’ systems. As it was, they hadn’t yet seen that Zac was there too, having disappeared behind the bar before they arrived. I didn’t know what he’d gone to do, but if he didn’t hurry back, he was going to have to play catch-up, because I was already feeling the tequila’s effects.

I poured a mouthful for Gavin and then tipped the spout into my mouth to finish off the bottle.

“Looks like I arrived just in time.” Zac’s words met my ears before I saw him, and someone in the group cursed.

“You’ve gotta be shittin’ me.” That was Travis.

Zac held up a couple more bottles of tequila and winked. “Mind if I join you?”

“Yes,” Daire said automatically.

“When you bring me gifts like that, I suppose I can’t deny you.” I jumped off the table to lift the VIP rope. “But first, you have to pay the toll.”

“The toll, huh?” The mischievous glint in Zac’s eyes told me we were both on the same wavelength, and he proved that point when his lips crashed down on mine.

“Dead,” Donovan said from somewhere behind us. “I’m dead. Hell has officially frozen over.”

“I knew there was some hate fucking going on,” Travis added.

Preston snorted. “Bullshit. You didn’t have a clue.”

“Hello? I’m the master of hate fucking turned into relationships. Have you *met* Caleb?”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, ‘relationship’? This is East we’re talking about,” Gavin said. “Say that word around him and he’ll break out in hives. Clearly they’re just hooking up.”

“Wanna put a bet on that?” West replied. Of course his mind had gone right to using his inside knowledge to get a leg up.

I gave one final nip to Zac’s lower lip and pulled away to open the rope. “Toll paid in full. You may enter, you sexy fucker. I’ll take these.” I plucked the bottles out of his hands and set them on the table. It wasn’t until I looked up that I noticed the way the guys had all gone silent and stared between me and Zac like we’d both grown three heads. “Admiring the view?” I asked.

“We might,” Travis said. “If we knew what the fuck we were looking at.”

“I always questioned your intelligence when you went back to Caleb. But the rest of you lovesick idiots should be able to tell when someone has a new man in their life.”

Their deer-in-headlights expressions were extremely satisfying after my having to put up with their nauseating displays of affection over the last year or so. It was about time *I* was disgustingly over the top with the PDA, and the alcohol wasn’t helping to restrain me.

“Oh? Is that what I am?” Zac said by my ear.

“Is that a problem?” I whispered.

“Definitely not.”

“Good, because I’m sick of keeping you a secret.”

Zac’s eyes darkened and just when I was about to suggest he take me somewhere private, I heard, “Are we sure he gave us a shot of tequila and not absinthe? Because I could’ve sworn East just confessed to being in a relationship with *Zac.”*

“That I did, Young Truitt,” I said, turning back to face my shell-shocked friends. “I’m told that’s what one becomes when you stop and talk to each other after having a really great fuck.”

“Oh my God.” JT buried his face in West’s neck.

“I’m sorry, Golden Boy, was I suppose to say we recite poetry to each other?”

Zac snorted and pressed a kiss to my cheek. “Your mouth is—”

“One of the things you like best about me?”

“That, but I was going to say ‘out of control tonight.’”

“Nah.” West chuckled, eyeing his friend. “He’s just back to his usual self. Gotta say, I kind of missed him.”

“You’re the only one,” Daire grumbled from the back of the group. Then, like they were in some kind of trance, each and every one of my friends turned in the direction of the bar.

“Is that—” Donovan whacked JT’s arm, pointing.

“It looks like—”

“Fuck.” Travis shifted to his toes to look over my shoulder. “What’s Professor Hardass doing here?”

Wait, did he just say—

“King’s here?” West said it like a question for the benefit of the others, but I took it for what it was—a heads-up.

King was here.

My inebriated brain tried to play catch-up with the new information I’d just been given, but it wasn’t making any sense. There was no way King would be *here*. Not when he knew Zac and I were going to be. He’d told us point-blank that it wasn’t smart.

But when Zac and I turned around, there was no mistaking the sex god who’d just walked in the club.

Fuck. Me.

King exuded the kind of sex appeal most men only dreamed of. His presence alone commanded one’s attention as he scanned the club searching for the two he’d come for—or would later. He was dressed tonight in tailored black pants and a black jacket fitted to his broad shoulders, and as he stood beside Preston’s man, Archer, he had every single person in the club’s attention—including my drooling friends.

“Please tell me I’m not dreaming.” Travis was the first to regain use of his horny brain cells. “Because I’ve imagined that man out the classroom more than I’d like to admit.”

“Hey.” Caleb whacked him in the arm. “I’m standing right here.”

“Come on, you can’t tell me he doesn’t make your dick twitch.”

I was about to tell them he better not be making *any* of their dicks fucking twitch when King's eyes locked on to me and Zac and his lips tugged into a small smirk.

"Jesus," Zac whispered by my ear. "Did he text you he was coming?"

I shook my head, but as if King had told us we couldn't speak, we said nothing else as he made his way through the crowd that was parting like the Red fucking Sea for him. King had this animal magnetism about him that all but paralyzed a person in place, and when he set his sights on us, there was no way we were going any-fucking-where.

"Preston, you and Daddy Filth stepping out with a third these days?" Donovan said, but I didn't hear Preston's answer if he gave one. The blood in my ears was making a quick detour south. So much so that I had no hope of hiding the hard-on throbbing between my thighs when King came to a stop in front of the VIP rope.

The guys had fallen unusually quiet behind us as King ran his eyes over the crowd no doubt gawking at him, and damn, he looked even better up close. He crooked a finger and angled his cheek for us.

The same force that had kept our feet rooted to the ground was the same one that pulled us toward him now. Both of us planted a kiss on him where he indicated, though the temptation to run my tongue down his chest, bare beneath his jacket, was strong.

"God*damn* you know how to make an entrance," I said. "You look…"

"Sexy as hell," Zac finished. "Like I almost don't give a shit we're being watched right now."

King raised a brow. "Oh? Are we?"

"Only if my friends haven't stroked out and hit the floor." I glanced behind me to where I could count every one of their jaws on the ground and smirked at King. "Told you."

"We thought you couldn't make it," Zac said.

King's hands went to our waists possessively. "Archer talked me into it."

I looked over at where Archer was whispering something in Preston's ear, and when I caught my friend's eye, he winked at me.

That sneaky little fucker. He'd already known about us?

"Will you be joining us?" I ran my fingers down the lapel of King's jacket and intended to slide them a little lower, but he chuckled and stopped my hand.

“I think you have some celebrating to do with your friends first, but don’t worry. I have plans for you later.” With his hand covering mine, he casually slid them over his erection, and I moaned.

“Are you fucking kidding?”

His sinful smile said it all. “Zac, would you care to join me at the bar while East resuscitates his friends?”

“Damn right I will.”

“Not so fast, you two.” I turned around to grab one of the bottles Zac had brought from the bar to find someone had already switched out the cap for a spout.

I had the *best* friends. Or maybe that was my good mood talking.

“You have to do celebratory shots with me before you lust after me from afar.”

“Uh oh. We may all be stumbling out of here, King,” Zac said.

“As long as it’s into my bed,” King replied.

“That.” I pointed to King. “Let’s toast to that.” I lifted up the bottle to come up with something on the fly.

“Wait, we need glasses.” Zac started toward the table behind us, but I hooked my finger in the waist of his pants and tugged him back.

“This isn’t that kind of shot,” I said with a wink, and held the bottle up again. “Cheers to you and you and me, and cheers to crazy-hot fuckery.” I tipped the bottle back, letting my mouth fill with tequila, and then pulled Zac toward me. He cupped my head and angled himself so he could swallow it all down, and as wolf whistles sounded behind us, he swept his tongue against mine in a kiss that made my head fuzzy and my cock throb.

“*Shit*,” I said when I pulled away. “That mouth.”

Zac answered with a twist to his lips, and I had to shake my head clear before pouring another round into my mouth and reaching for King.

But he grabbed hold of me first, practically inhaling both the tequila and me and stealing my breath on top of it. Other than the curses and gasps that were white noise in the background, it was like we only existed in a bubble for that too-quick moment in time.

My body was boneless by the time our mouths parted, but his firm grasp on me kept me from busting my ass.

“Have fun,” King said by my ear once I regained my balance, and then he lifted the rope for Zac to join him. King looked past me and gave a cheeky nod to all my friends. “Enjoy your night, gentlemen.”

And then they, along with Archer and Preston, headed to the bar.

“Am I having a heart attack right now or have we entered some alternate dimension and my body’s still catching up?” Donovan was the first to speak, but every one of them still looked stunned, their attention bouncing between me and the two who’d just left.

“No, I know what’s happening.” Gavin took the tequila bottle from me and sniffed it. “East made sure they slipped a little something in here and we’re all hallucinating. That’s the only explanation.”

“Is it?” I could feel the self-satisfied smile tipping my lips. “Or maybe you’re just now realizing what a great fucking lay I am that I have *two* men I can call mine while you could only handle one.”

Travis’s eyes almost popped right out of his head. “Oh my fucking God. So they’re your boyfriends? *Boyfriends?*”

I wrinkled my nose. “Do either of those two *men* look like boys to you? They’re mine, and that’s all you need to know.”

“That’s impossible,” West said. “Hooking up in secret? Yes. *Yours?* Are you shitting me, East?”

Travis rounded on West. “Wait, you *knew* about King too and you didn’t say anything?”

West held his hands up. “Don’t turn this around on me. East is the one having some kind of identity crisis.”

“Identity crisis?” I wrinkled my nose and looked over my shoulder to where King and Zac stood, looking so damn fine. “More like a sexual awakening. And yes. You should be *so* fucking jealous.”

“But you told us threesomes were too much work,” Gavin pointed out. “I swear to God you said that.”

“He did.” Nothing I said ever seemed to faze Daire, but he was looking at me right now with confusion marring his brow. “And old people.” He gestured toward the bar with his drink. “He’s old.”

“Old*er*, but so fuckin’ hot,” Travis said, and collapsed onto the couch before falling dramatically into his boyfriend’s lap. Caleb shook his head and laughed as he threw his arm over his waist to keep him where he was.

“And Zac? You’ve always hated that guy,” Donovan said.

“Some of the best sex I’ve had is *because* I hated that guy.” I walked over to Travis to pour some tequila down his throat. Soothe the jealous ache and all that. “Although hate’s such a strong word.”

“Is *looove* a better one?” JT said from where he sat on West’s lap. Little Golden Boy looked awfully smug over there. That just wouldn’t do.

“I don’t know what that exactly feels like,” I winked at him. “But maybe.”

JT’s mouth fell open, and that was the perfect opportunity for me to go over and fill it with more liquor.

When he swallowed, I narrowed my eyes on him. “I just want you to know, this group turned soft when *you* turned up.”

JT looked over to the bar, where Preston was all but hanging off Archer, then back to me. “I don’t know.” He bit at West’s jaw line. “I’m pretty sure you all finally got hard for a special some*one*—or two—when I showed up.”

“No one likes a braggart.” I looked at my best friend, who just grinned at me. “Shut him up, would you? He’s killing my buzz.”

“My pleasure.” West captured his boyfriend’s lips in a wicked kiss, and for the first time ever, I didn’t feel that dry-heaving sensation that usually overcame me at the sight of their love-fest. Instead, my eyes drifted back to where King had his arm around Zac’s waist and was whispering something into his ear, his eyes on me. He winked, and I almost melted into the fucking floor.

“Look,” Donovan said as he perched on the arm of the couch Kelly had taken up residence on. “I know we’ve all been watching our tongues because you’ve been going through…things. But how did this even happen?”

“Who cares?” Travis said, sitting up. “The guy’s been fucking not one but *two* of his professors.”

“Zac is not a professor, dumbass.”

“Well, he’s the professor’s something… I’ve been drinking too much to keep this straight.”

“Teacher’s assistant,” Gavin said, shaking his head. “He used to get up East’s ass all the time about his work.”

“Now he’s up his ass for a different reason.” Daire’s comment was so unlike him that everyone in the lounge looked his way. “What? The joke was right there, assholes.”

“I don’t want to hear *jokes*,” Travis said, waggling his brows. “I want to hear how it was. I mean, we’re talking King here. *King*. We need all the dirty details. He’s a total dom, right? At first I thought Zac might be

spanking your ass, but after watching the two of you with him, I'm calling it—total fucking dom."

"Let's just say"—I swung the bottle in my fingers and shrugged—"King's the only person I'll ever let *punish* me."

"I knew it." Travis grabbed the bottle off me and took a swig.

Caleb snorted. "Of course *you* need two people to handle you."

I rolled my eyes, happy to know I still had a like/hate relationship right here whenever I felt like sparring, because the only kind of fighting I wanted to do with Zac these days was wrestling his clothes off him.

Speaking of which…

My eyes wandered back to the bar, my attention now solely focused on the two I knew were waiting on me, and I decided it was time to peace out. I'd come, I'd celebrated—no, I'd celebrated, and now I wanted to come. And I had not one, but *two* hot men to seduce. What the hell was I doing standing all the way over here?

"All right, you lushes, drink up and tell 'em to put it on my tab." I clapped West on the shoulder and started to leave when I remembered, "Oh wait, I'm rich but not for, like, another month. *Whoops.* You're all good for it, right?"

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FORTY-FIVE

east

Graduation Day
2 months later

I'D BEEN NO stranger to being called to a professor's office for a stern talking-to throughout my schooling years. So it was no surprise to find a message from Professor Kingston waiting for me on my very last day at Astor, instructing me to see him before the commencement ceremony began.

It had been very specific in nature. The time, the place, the reason why—to get ready for the ceremony together. Not that I'd ever expect anything else from the strict, no-nonsense professional he was within the walls of this university. But when I knocked on his door and slipped inside the office, fully expecting to find him and his gorgeous TA, I instead found an empty room waiting for me.

What the hell?

It'd been a couple of months since my father's arrest and my mother's filing for divorce, and while my family continued to dread more future unraveling whenever my father's epic trial finally began, I was determined to thrive. With the help of my kickass friends, my grandparents' trust fund, and the two delicious men I called mine, I'd made the comeback of all comebacks.

I mean, did anyone really doubt it? I was James Easton, the leader of the Park Avenue Princes, and today I was about to leave Astor the way it was always intended—on fucking top.

I glanced at the clock, making sure I hadn't messed up the time, but no. I was exactly where I'd been told to be with a couple of minutes to spare. So where the hell were they?

I locked the door and wandered around the office, looking at the desk I knew was Zac's—to be vacated after today—and wondered how our illustrious professor was feeling about that. It was the end of an era of sorts, and as I made my way to King's desk, I decided it was time to go out with a bang.

After all, I was here to get ready, right? I might as well help along the process if those two were running late.

With a mischievous grin, I kicked out of my Italian loafers and unbuttoned my pants before stripping them off. Then I made quick work of my shirt and laid both pieces of clothing over the back of the chair, which I pulled out and took a seat in.

I'd barely had time to straighten my ascot and kick my feet up on the desk when the handle of the door moved, then paused, before it was unlocked.

As Professor *Kingston's* broad shoulders filled the doorway, I slipped my hands behind my head, displaying my body to his hungry gaze.

"You're late," I told him in the most professional tone I could muster while wearing my boxer briefs and ascot.

"So I am," King said as he stepped aside, and Zac followed in after him with two hangers that held our graduation robes.

"Holy shit, East." Zac quickly shut the door and turned the lock. "What are you doing?"

"*Waiting*, which is not something I'm good at or accustomed to."

"Impatience is not a virtue." King smirked as he came over to me, and I kicked my legs off the desk and wrapped them around his thighs, caging him in.

"I don't think you're with me for my virtues. Maybe my lack of them."

King's hands went to the arms of the chair, and he leaned in like he was going to kiss me, but at the last second he turned his head so that my lips grazed his stubbled cheek. Then he slipped a finger beneath my ascot and said, "You were supposed to meet us already dressed."

"Oh, my bad." I gave him a cheeky grin. "I thought you told me to meet you to *get* dressed. I just assumed you wanted the honor."

I moved his hand on top of my dick, and Zac snorted out a laugh.

“I told you we should’ve tied him up somewhere so he couldn’t get into trouble before the ceremony.” He lifted the plastic from over the robes and then set them on the door hanger. “By the way, you do have to actually wear clothes under your robe. Don’t even think about freeballing.”

“Damn. I was hoping for a *stiff* wind to give everyone a show.”

King gave my cock a gentle squeeze that I arched into, and then he brushed his lips over mine. “How about we keep what’s mine private, hmm?”

“So possessive. You two just want to keep me all to yourselves,” I said, as his mouth grazed over my cheek, my jaw, before he pressed a kiss beneath my ear.

Zac buttoned the collar of his shirt and reached for the tie he’d brought with him. “You got a problem with that?”

“No. Just curious if, once we leave Astor for good, you plan to show me off in public. I *am* quite the catch.”

“You won’t be leaving anywhere for good if you don’t get dressed.” King straightened and tapped my legs, and I dropped my feet to the floor. “Up.”

“Yes, Professor Kingston,” I drawled as I stood up from the chair. But then King fingered the silk at my neck and cocked his head.

“Make sure you’re wearing this tonight. Only this.” His eyes darkened as he walked over to Zac. “You too.”

“If that’s what you want, sir,” Zac said, dropping his hands when King took over knotting his tie.

With an exaggerated sigh, I tugged my pants back on and slipped into my button-up. “I can’t believe you’re asking me to put clothes *on*. We’re really going backward in this relationship.”

“Can you believe he’s actually saying that word without having to down half a bottle of tequila first?” Zac cracked to King.

“I heard that,” I said.

“You were supposed to.” Zac reached for one of the robes and pulled it off the hanger. “I wanted to make sure you didn’t bolt for the door when I pointed it out to you.”

“Just because I don’t say the word often—”

“Ever,” King said, taking his robe from the hanger he’d hooked onto his coat rack.

“Okay, *ever*. Doesn’t mean I haven’t realized what this is or what I want and don’t want. And just like you”—I ran my hand down King’s arm as I passed him by—“I don’t want anyone touching your big poppa cock except me and Zac.”

Zac’s lips twitched as he shook his head at me.

“What? That would make this a relationship, right? Exclusivity?”

“Well done,” Zac said, in full teacher’s assistant mode. “Maybe I should have you write a paper on it.”

I put a hand on his chest and leaned up to nip at his lower lip. “Only if I get to thoroughly research the subject. You know, study dates, tutoring with my professor…”

King chuckled, and when I glanced over my shoulder to see him draped in black and pulling up the zipper, I licked my lips.

“If we promise to wear only ascots tonight, can you take us wearing that —and *only* that?”

King inclined his head. “I believe I can make that happen. *If* you manage to behave yourself for the rest of the day.”

“Since that’s only about two more hours, consider me a fucking Boy Scout.”

“I can’t exactly imagine you as a Boy Scout.”

“No? What about a member of some all-powerful secret society?”

King looked between the two of us, his expression turning serious. “You’re not ready yet. Remember, patience *is* a virtue.”

“Well, since Zac *is* patient, does that mean he’s ready?”

“He told us we wouldn’t know anything until we graduate,” Zac pointed out.

“Which is today. So is there something we should be doing? Some kind of quest or trial by fire to move this along?”

“You’ll know when you’re supposed to know,” King said.

I let out an exasperated groan. “Okay, cryptic Batman.”

“Just because you’re sleeping in my bed, doesn’t mean I’m about to give up all my secrets, little prince.”

“You give up nothing.”

King smirked. “Just my body and my heart.”

I couldn’t tell if he was being serious or not, but the way *my* heart responded to that declaration was to skip a couple of extra beats.

“Come on, you need to get into your robe,” Zac said as he fastened his and then reached for mine. I slipped my arms inside the garment and pulled the zipper up, and once we were all wearing *way* too many layers for my liking, Zac reached for the door.

“Hey, before we go—” The words tumbled out of my mouth before I could seem to stop them, and Zac paused and turned back to face me. “I just wanted to, you know…” I glanced back at King. “I wanted to thank you both for being here for me over the last couple of months, but especially when my father was hauled off in handcuffs.”

Zac reached for my hand. “We wouldn’t have wanted to be anywhere else.”

“Zac’s right.” King came over to us and cupped our faces. “I don’t know how the two of you managed to—”

“Seduce you into loving us?” I said flippantly, before realizing exactly what I’d said.

Zac’s head whipped in my direction, and King’s eyes seemed to glimmer at me. “Is *that* what I’m doing?”

“I… Uh… I don’t know. I’m the last person who would know.”

“I don’t necessarily believe that,” Zac said as he squeezed my hand, and something in my stomach flipped.

“Well, you should. The only thing I really know about myself is that I’m a greedy bastard.”

“You’re only *just* working that out?” Zac asked.

“No, but it’s become a little more apparent of late. Like the two of you, for instance. I always assumed a threesome would be way too much work for very little payoff. But now I can’t imagine having one of you without the other. You both put in equal effort, and I appreciate that.”

I looked between them and patted their chests. “I appreciate the both of *you*. Plus, the private island doesn’t hurt either. And the restaurant your family owns, Zac, so I never have to cook again? All qualities that have made you practically irresistible.”

“So what you’re saying is…” King said, reminding me of where this conversation had started.

“Oh, right—that while I’m not overly familiar with the emotion, if I were to base it off the way my annoying friends all act around the people they claim to love, I *think* I might l-l-l-l…l-l-l-l…lo—”

“*Love*?” King said.

“Yeah, that’s it.” I nodded, proud of myself. “Both of you.”

A deep frown pulled between Zac’s brows. “We’re going to have to work on that.”

King shook his head, but I could see his affection for me in those dark depths. He swiped my cap from the desk and placed it on me. “You’re right, you know. Not that you had to seduce me into it, but that I love you. Both of you.”

“But...you do?”

King’s lip curled as a soft chuckle escaped them. “Trust me, I’m just as shocked as you are. But somewhere along the way, somewhere on that island and back in this city, I stopped doing the smart thing and followed my heart instead. And my heart’s telling me that I love you.”

I think *my* heart stopped with those three words, and I could only stare, slack-jawed, as he reached for Zac and told him the same thing. My ears were ringing and I could only read his lips, so I assumed that was what he was saying, but… *Holy fuck.* No one had ever said that to me. Not my parents; not my grandparents. Obviously none of my previous hookups.

A warmth I’d never felt before flooded my veins and my chest tightened, my heart kick-starting again but in a weird stutter.

So *this* was what everyone had been going on about. This feeling. It was strange, but not unwelcome at all, and I even felt tears prick my eyes. I swallowed hard to get rid of them as King and Zac waited for my response to a question I hadn’t heard.

“East?” Zac said, touching my arm.

I cleared my throat, but it didn’t help the way my voice rasped as I said, “Not you too. I can only take one person falling in love with me within the span of an hour.”

He grinned and cupped my face with both hands. I tried not to think about how ridiculous I had to look in this dumb cap while he stared at me, looking handsome as ever. “Guess that’s just too bad, because if this is the time for I-love-yous, I’m not letting you leave the room until you know that I do.”

Goddammit. I blinked furiously as my eyes began to sting again, then I pulled my lower lip between my teeth and bit down hard. That helped with the tears, at least, but my body had started involuntarily trembling, and *that* I couldn’t seem to stop.

But King and Zac drawing me into one of their all-consuming embraces did. The tremors instantly eased at their touch, and I took in a deep breath, inhaling their scents.

I was addicted. There was no denying that.

“Well, fuck,” I said, and their answering chuckles had me grinning as I looked up. I tried to pin Zac with a stern look. “You just couldn’t help yourself, could you? Just had to go and put it out there.”

“No regrets.”

I let out a huff, but there was no irritation behind it. “Fine. Since you really want to hear me say it, I love you. Both of you. It ruins my plans to remain unaffected and unattached for my adult life, but there you have it. And it’s all your fault.”

The wide smile that crossed King’s face combined with Zac’s beaming grin made something inside me fall into place, and any discomfort I thought I’d feel from opening myself up to them, putting my heart on the line, vanished.

A knock on the door had us all jerking our heads in that direction.

“Tyrone? We’re heading down to faculty lineup.”

“I’ll meet you there,” King called out, and then arched his brow at the two of us. “Don’t even think about misbehaving in the five minutes before you join with your classmates.”

“Would we do that?” I said.

“*You* would.” Zac winked at me as King reached for Zac’s cap on the desk and placed it just right on his head.

Or just wrong, really, because they weren’t exactly the most attractive accessories. Somehow Zac pulled it off, though, but only because he was gorgeous anyway.

King tucked his own cap under his arm and began to back away, appraising us. He unlocked the door, then said, “I’m really proud of you both. And I’m really proud to call you mine. Enjoy your big day.”

As the door clicked shut behind him, Zac took in a deep breath and then surprised me by wrapping his arms tight around me. He just held me, and I rested my chin on his shoulder as we stood there in the middle of King’s office.

“None of this would’ve happened if you hadn’t been such a little shit, you know,” he said.

“You’re thanking me for being a shit?”

“I am. And I wouldn’t have you any other way.”

“You just want me to say it again, don’t you?”

“Would it kill you?”

I grinned against his shoulder. “I love you. Even more than I used to love hating you.”

Zac laughed and gave me a squeeze before letting go. He straightened my robe and gave me a once-over before nodding. “Ready to go graduate?”

“If that means we can get to the afterparty quicker, then yes.”

He gestured for me to go first. “After you, little shit.”

WITH THE SUN blazing overhead, I used the printed program to fan myself as the class valedictorian finished up her speech, and then clapped with all the politeness I could muster. I was sure it was a decent speech full of “go conquer the world” encouragement, but I’d had different points of focus. Namely, the handsome-even-in-regalia professor sitting on stage, and the striking teacher’s assistant sitting farther down the same row as me. Every time I caught Zac’s eye, he smirked, and I wanted to pass him a note to tell him to keep the honors cords he’d added to his robe for us to play with later.

When I leaned forward again to tell him just that, West kicked the back of my chair and I found myself turning around instead.

But he only tapped his watch. I glanced down at mine to see the message come through our group thread.

Let the countdown begin.

Good. Now they needed to get this show on the road so the timing would work out perfectly.

The first couple rows of graduates got to their feet—including Preston, since they’d sat us alphabetically—and formed into a line leading up to the stage. With it being King’s final commencement, he had the honor of standing with the dean—JT’s mom—to hand out the diplomas. I kept a check on my watch, the minutes ticking down as, one by one, each of the graduates crossed the stage. Daire followed not long after Preston, and we all had no shame in bringing the noise with each prince that crossed the stage. West had somehow commandeered a horn, and every time the damn thing blasted, security wandered the aisles to figure out where it was coming from.

My row inched closer to the stage, and I looked out to where all the families were sitting and spotted my mother in the front of the section, along with my grandparents, whom I had yet to actually meet in person since they'd reinstated my trust. Which was set to be active three weeks from today.

Being poor was just not for me.

"James Easton," Professor Livingston called out, and as the crowd began to clap and the princes went wild—including that damn horn—I straightened my shoulders and sauntered across the stage, reveling in the attention. But to my surprise, not the attention of everyone there, just two in particular, and one of them was looking at me proudly, a diploma ready in his grasp.

"Congratulations, East," Dean Hawthorne said, giving me a tight smile. I wasn't her favorite, but that was fine by me. She'd miss my antics when I was gone.

I grinned and headed down to the next person waiting for me, and when King's large hand shook mine and he looked at me with that heady stare, it was a wonder I didn't melt right there on the stage.

"Congratulations, James," he said low in my ear as he handed me the diploma and we both turned to smile at the camera. I was going to need that one framed.

"Thank you, sir."

"It's been my pleasure." King winked at me as the next name was called, and I left the stage with weak knees. I made it back to my seat just in time for Zac's turn, and I, along with my friends who were starting to come around to the idea that he and King weren't just phases of mine, let out cheers as he crossed the stage.

No, I'd thrown out the big L-word, hadn't I? Something I never actually thought I'd do. With anyone. And I'd said it twice, and to two different men.

The same two men currently shaking each other's hands and posing for the camera, and damn, they looked good together. Even better with me.

West soon followed, and then Travis, Caleb, and finally Donovan bringing up the rear for our crew. I checked my watch again, and with only a minute to go, they called out the final student's name.

Right on time… My execution was impeccable. They were all welcome.

The second the final student walked off the stage, the loud boom of fireworks behind the elaborate setup had everyone jumping in their seats and turning, as the shell whistled up into the air in a stream of smoke and then sprinkled the sky with the school colors.

I smiled and looked behind me to see the rest of our crew whooping and hollering as more fireworks ascended into the air, sending our class out of Astor with a bang.

I mean, really, had they expected us to go out the same way as last year's class, with some tearful speech and orchestral tribute that put everyone to sleep? I didn't think so.

This was the end of our reign here at Astor. A reminder of who had ruled this place for the last four years, and now it was up to the rest of the student body to pick up the baton and try to follow in our footsteps.

Good luck with that.

As the show headed to its epic finale, I checked my watch again for the last surprise. Moments later, the plane flew across the sky, trailing behind it our final message to the place we'd graced with our presence—and maybe terrorized a few times along the way:

PARK AVENUE PRINCES—OUT!

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Thank you for reading Notorious Park Avenue Prince!

East was such a unique character to write and get in the mind of, but finding his HEA's, and discovering *who* could put up with him, made his story one of our absolute favorites.

We hope you enjoyed his East*ness* and Zac and King's ability to shut him up with a blistering kiss or a well-placed ascot.

Craving more of our Park Avenue Princes? You're in luck! The rest of their stories are available 0n Amazon or FREE on Kindle Unlimited!

Infamous Park Avenue Prince
West & JT

Insatiable Park Avenue Prince
Donovan & Kelly

Scandalous Park Avenue Prince
Preston & Archer

Possessive Park Avenue Prince
Daire & Gavin

Salacious Park Avenue Prince
Travis & Caleb

Join our reader group for all things BrElla (Brooke + Ella) books!
The Naughty Umbrella

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meet the park avenue kings

Who are we? Nobody really knows. We're the seven most powerful heirs to empires, ruling Manhattan from our thrones on Park Avenue.

By day, we're the elite, untouchable, and more connected than you could ever imagine. By night, we revel in the darkness of our secrets, pulling strings that make the city bow to our whims.

Ruthless.
Dangerous.
We're the Park Avenue Kings.

In this city of power and desire, where the line between love and obsession blurs, nothing is off-limits—and we wouldn't have it any other way.

SAVAGE
Park Avenue Kings #1

DEVILISH
Park Avenue Kings #2

IMMORAL
Park Avenue Kings #3

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special thanks

So many thanks to our incredible team. We couldn’t do this without you!

Hang Le, who designs the most amazing covers in the whole world. Arran, our editor who tells us hey idiots, a blunt and a joint aren’t the same thing. Linda at Foreword PR, who keeps us in line and on task and is a huge support in this crazy world. Sarah, our new PA – thank you for taking on a couple of discombobulated authors and trying to organize us. We’ll eventually get there. Gel with Tempting Illustrations for all the super hot teasers for this series. Ren Saliba for the gorgeous cover images of the princes. Becca, our FairyPlotMother, for listening to our crazy ideas and for your enthusiasm.

And most importantly, you, our readers. Whether you’re in our private reader group, The Naughty Umbrella, on our Instagram or Tiktok, or one of our Patrons, we appreciate each and every one of you so much for picking up our books. It means so much that you’d spend your time with our wild stories, so big Brella hugs to you!

We’d like to give a special shout out to the awesome Brellas on our Patreon who helped brainstorm with us. Corinne for naming “The Cellar,” Marianne for “Libertine" (keep reading for that one ~wink~), Meredith for “Nocturne,” Dreamer for "Limitless,” Mariah for “Professor Rathborne” as well as for our boat name "Roi de la Mer."

We’ve had an absolute blast with this series, and while we’re sad to see our princes graduate, it’s time to meet the Park Avenue Kings.

See you at midnight on January 9th, 2025 for Savage (Park Avenue Kings #1), should you choose to accept this invitation...

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also by brooke blaine

South Haven Series

A Little Bit Like Love

A Little Bit Like Desire

The Unforgettable Duet

Forget Me Not

Remember Me When

Hate to Love You Series

Bedhead

L.A. Liaisons Series

Licked

Hooker

P.I.T.A.

Romantic Suspense

Flash Point

PresLocke Series

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Aced

Locked

Wedlocked

Fallen Angel Series

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Halo

Viper

Angel

An Affair In Paris

Lust. Hate. Love

Elite Series

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Danger Zone

Need For Speed

Classified

Dare To Try Series

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Dare You

Dare Me

Truth Or Dare

Malvagio Series

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Forbidden Mafia Prince

Sinful Mafia Prince

Park Avenue Princes

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Infamous Park Avenue Prince

Insatiable Park Avenue Prince

Scandalous Park Avenue Prince

Possessive Park Avenue Prince

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Sex Addict

Shiver

Wrapped Up in You

All I Want for Christmas…Is My Sister's Boyfriend

Jingle Bell Rock

Once Upon a Sexy Scrooge

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also by ella frank

The Exquisite Series

Exquisite

Entice

Edible

The Temptation Series

Try

Take

Trust

Tease

Tate

True

Confessions Series

Confessions: Robbie

Confessions: Julien

Confessions: Priest

Confessions: The Princess, The Prick & The Priest

Confessions: Henri

Confessions: Bailey

Confessions: Ethan

Confessions: Zayne

Confessions: Chloé

Prime Time Series

Inside Affair

Breaking News

Headlines

Intentions Duet

Bad Intentions

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Chicago Heat Duet

Wicked Heat

Wicked Flame

Sunset Cove Series

Finley

Devil's Kiss

Masters Among Monsters Series

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about brooke blaine

Brooke Blaine is a USA Today Bestselling Author best known for writing romantic comedy and M/M romance. Her novels lead with humor and heart, but Brooke never shies away from throwing in something extra naughty that will scandalize her conservative Southern family for life (bless their hearts).

She's a choc-o-holic, lives for eighties bands (which means she thinks guyliner is totally underrated), believes it's always wine o'clock, and lives with the coolest cat on the planet—her Ragdoll/Maine Coon mix, Jackson Agador Spartacus.

Brooke's Links
Brooke's Newsletter
Brooke & Ella's Naughty Umbrella
www.BrookeBlaine.com

If you'd like to join Brooke & Ella's Patreon for a look behind the scenes, to read chapters early, to get ARCs first, this is the place right here!

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about ella frank

Ella Frank is the *USA Today* Bestselling Author of the *Temptation series,* including Try, Take, and Trust and is the co-author of the fan-favorite *Fallen Angel series.* Her *Prime Time series* has been praised as “highly entertaining!” and “sexy as hell!”

A life-long fan of the romance genre, Ella is best known for her steamy, heartfelt, M/M romances.

If you’d like to join Ella & Brooke’s Patreon for a look behind the scenes, to read chapters early, to get ARCs first, this is the place right here!

Brella Patreon

You can also find them in their Facebook Group

The Naughty Umbrella
(Facebook Group)

And if you would like to talk with other readers who love Ella’s character’s from her Chicagoverse, you can find them **HERE** at
Ella Frank’s Temptation Series Facebook Group.

Want to stay up to date with all things Ella?
You can sign up here to join her newsletter and get a FREE ebook.

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